

Justinian, Theodora, and the Church of Saints Sergius and Bacchus

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THE EMPEROR JUSTINIAN was an avid builder of churches. To this day his name immediately evokes at least two world-renowned edifices that symbolize the piety and power of the imperial builder—Hagia Sophia in Constantinople and San Vitale in Ravenna.¹ One of the grand surviving churches of Justinian, SS. Sergius and Bacchus at Constantinople, now the mosque Küçük Ayasofya Camii, was built within the Hormisdas palace complex, where he once lived.² There has been considerable debate about when it was built and the precise circumstances surrounding its construction. The prevailing consensus, first formulated by Mango over thirty years ago, is that Justinian's role in its construction was subsidiary. Instead, Justinian's wife, the empress Theodora, provided the impetus for the church. She had it constructed rapidly in the early 530s, designing it to serve the liturgical needs of a large group of monks persecuted for their opposition to the Christological definition of the council of Chalcedon. These adherents of the belief in Christ's single nature, later known as Monophysites (the term used here for convenience), were driven from their eastern abodes before being welcomed at Constantinople by Theodora and housed in the Palace of Hormisdas.³ This reconstruction of events has been used to give greater prominence and independence

1 On Justinian as church builder: R. Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, 4th ed., rev. R. Krautheimer and S. Ćurčić (Harmondsworth, 1986), 225–27 and J. Alchermes, “Art and Architecture,” in *Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, ed. M. Maas (Cambridge, 2005), 343–75, with essential background in C. Mango, *Byzantine Architecture* (New York, 1985), 35–38.

2 Details in J. Ebersolt and A. Thiers, *Les églises de Constantinople* (Paris, 1913), 21–51 (fundamental); A. Van Millingen, *Byzantine Churches in Constantinople* (London, 1912; repr. 1974), 62–83; R. Janin, *Les églises et les monastères*, 2nd. ed. (Paris 1969), 451–55; P. Sanpaolesi, “La chiesa dei SS Sergio e Bacco a Costantinopoli,” *Rivista dell'istituto nazionale d'archeologia e storia dell'arte* 10 (1961): 116–80 (richly illustrated, including architectural cross-sections); W. Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon zur Topographie*

Istanbul (Tübingen, 1977), 177–83; T. F. Mathews, *The Early Churches of Constantinople* (University Park, Pa. 1971), 42–51, and *The Byzantine Churches of Istanbul: A Photographic Survey* (University Park, Pa.–London 1976), 242–59. Note also Mango, *Architecture*, 58–59; P. Grossmann, “Beobachtungen zum ursprünglichen Grundriß der Sergios- und Bakchoskirche in Konstantinopel,” *IstMitt* 39 (1989): 153–59; and H. Svenshon and R. H. W. Stichel, “Neue Beobachtungen an der ehemalige Kirche der Heiligen Sergios und Bakchos (Küçük Ayasofya Camisi) in Istanbul,” *IstMitt* 50 (2000): 389–409.

3 C. Mango, “The Church of Saints Sergius and Bacchus at Constantinople and the Alleged Tradition of Octagonal Palatine Churches,” *JÖB* 21 (1972): 189–93 (repr. in his *Studies on Constantinople* [London, 1993]); R. Krautheimer, “Again Saints Sergius and Bacchus at Constantinople,” *JÖB* 23

(1974): 251–53; T. F. Mathews, “Architecture et liturgie dans les premières églises palatiales de Constantinople,” *Revue de l'art* 24 (1974): 22–29; C. Mango, “The Church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus Once Again,” *BZ* 68 (1975): 385–92 (repr. in Mango, *Studies*), and, most recently, J. Bardill, “The Church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus in Constantinople and the Monophysite Refugees,” *DOP* 54 (2000): 1–11. Earlier views: van Millingen, *Churches*, 65; Ebersolt and Thiers, *Églises*, 23–4; C. Delvoye, “Sur la date de la fondation des Saints Serge-et-Bacchus de Constantinople et de Saint-Vital de Ravenne,” in *Hommages à Léon Herrmann* (Brussels, 1960), 263–76 (a flawed study).

to Theodora in imperial religious policy, and to suggest that Justinian was both easily manipulated by her and lukewarm about enforcing his own doctrinal decrees.⁴

The present contribution to the scholarly discussion on SS. Sergius and Bacchus proceeds, first, by focusing on Justinian's construction of churches during the years in which he resided at the Hormisdas palace, then by demonstrating that the church of SS. Sergius and Bacchus cannot have been established at any stage for the refugee Monophysite monks in the palace. Next, it moves to propose a construction date for the church commencing well before Justinian became Augustus in April 527, which leads to consideration of the genesis of Justinian's church. Recent research by Connor, Bardill, and Shahîd has drawn attention to the stylistic and other affinities between SS. Sergius and Bacchus and the earlier church of St. Polyeuctus, built by Anicia Juliana, Constantinople's most distinguished woman at the time.⁵ Moreover, Bardill's redating of St. Polyeuctus to the early 520s indirectly throws new light on the context in which Justinian constructed SS. Sergius and Bacchus.⁶ This research is now expanded by arguing that the impetus for the construction of SS. Sergius and Bacchus is to be found in Justinian's political rivalry with Anicia Juliana in the early to mid-520s. This earlier date better explains not only the political context of the church's founding but also its location and function. Insufficient attention has been paid to the church's dedicatory inscription and other key texts, as well as to the political and religious background of the period of Justinian's actual residency in the Hormisdas palace between 518 and 527. Significantly different implications follow from knowing that the church was conceived and largely built by the orthodox emperor Justinian on his own property during the reign of his uncle Justin, rather than by the Monophysite Theodora several years later, when the imperial couple no longer lived in the Palace of Hormisdas.

⁴ The impact of Mango's thesis can be measured in recent studies that take it for granted, and use it to reinforce the powerful role of Theodora: J. A. S. Evans, *The Age of Justinian* (London, 1996), 110–11; “The Monophysite Persecution,” *Ancient World* 27 (1996): 194; and *The Empress Theodora: Partner of Justinian* (Austin, 2002), 73–74, 81–83, 106–7; K. Noethlichs, “Iustinianus,” in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 19 (1999), 702; L. James, *Empresses and Power in Early Byzantium* (London, 2001), 150–52; M. McClanan, *Representations of Early Byzantine Empresses* (New York, 2002), 100–102; and I. Shahîd, “The Church of Hagios Polyeuktos in Constantinople: Some

Observations,” in *Festschrift in Honour of V. Christides*, ed. G. K. Livadas [= *Graeco-Arabica* 9–10] (Athens, 2004), 343–55.

⁵ C. L. Connor, “The Epigram in the Church of Hagios Polyeuktos in Constantinople and Its Byzantine Response,” *Byzantion* 69 (1999): 479–527; Bardill, “Refugees,” 4; I. Shahîd, “The Church of Sts Sergios and Bakhos at Constantinople, Some New Perspectives,” in *Byzantium State and Society: In Memory of Nikos Oikonomides* (Athens, 2003), 475–76.

⁶ *Byzantine Brickstamps* (Oxford, 2004), 62–64, 111–16.

Justinian and His Churches, 518–27

Justinian first came to notice, and first came to be involved in the building of churches, during the reign of Justin, who secured the imperial throne in July 518. At the time of Justin's coronation his adopted son Justinian was one of the emperor's personal bodyguards (*candidati*).⁷ Justin was in his mid-sixties at the time and Justinian, in his late thirties but still unmarried. Being the emperor's nephew and now bearing the honorary title *illustris*, he required his own mansion. Shortly after, by mid-520, Justinian was promoted to the position of *magister militum praesentalis*. At this stage he clearly was living in the Palace of Hormisdas, which was constructed not long after the foundation of the capital and was located between the hippodrome and the Sea of Marmara. It is likely that Justinian occupied the Hormisdas mansion from the time of Justin's accession or thereabouts. Like other such mansions at Constantinople (of which there were a considerable number by the 520s) that of Hormisdas must have been a compact collection of buildings and gardens. No physical traces of the palace remain. All we know about it is that it had a large heptaconch dining hall (*triklinos*), which would make it similar to the mansions of Lausus and Antiochus, whose remains can be identified.⁸ It has been remarked of these imposing edifices that “we cannot help being struck by their enormous proportions and ceremonial character.”⁹ Doubtless such aristocratic estates, including that of Hormisdas, resembled the mansions at Rome, which struck a visitor from Egyptian Thebes as being medium-sized cities in themselves, each with fora, temples, fountains, and baths. He was even prompted to verse: “One house is a town; the city hides ten thousand towns.”¹⁰

Once he occupied the Hormisdas palace in 518, Justinian lost no time in maximizing the opportunity to build a memorable and significant church on his new property.¹¹ On 29 June 519 he inquired of Pope Hormisdas about whether the pope could arrange for some relics of SS. Peter and Paul, as well as St. Laurence, to be forwarded to him at Constantinople. He wanted them for the basilica he was then

7 Victor of Tonnuna, *Chronicon* 101:

s.a. 518 (ed. C. Hartmann, *CCSL* 173a [2003]: 33 = T. Mommsen, *MGH AA* 11 [1894]: 196); Petrus Patricius in Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De ceremoniis* 1.93 (ed. J. Reiske [Bonn, 1829–30], 428.4).

8 Innocent of Marona, *Epistula de collatione cum Severianis habita* 4–6 (ACO 4.2: 169): “in uenerabili palatio suo quod cognominatur Hormisdae...prima itaque die conuenimus in eodem eptaconco triclinio....” G. Greatrex and J. Bardill, “Antiochus the

Praepositus, A Persian Eunuch at the Court of Theodosius II,” *DOP* 50 (1996): 171–97;

J. Bardill, “The Palace of Lausus and Nearby Monuments in Constantinople: A Topographical Study,” *AJA* 101 (1999): 67–93.

9 C. Mango, *Le développement urbain de Constantinople* (Paris, 1990), 28.

10 “Ἐις δόμος ἀστυ πέλει· πόλις ἀστεα μνημά κεύθει”: Olympiodorus, frag. 41.1 (= Photius, *Bibliotheca* 80) in R. Blockley, *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of*

the Later Roman Empire (Leeds, 1983), 2:204–5.

11 R. Janin, *Constantinople byzantine* (Paris, 1964), 358–59; R. Guillard, “Études sur le palais du Boukoléon: Le palais d'Hormisdas,” *Byzantinoslavica* 12 (1951): 210–24 (repr. in *Études de topographie de Constantinople byzantine* [Berlin-Amsterdam, 1969], 1:294–303).

constructing for the two apostles “hic in domo nostra,” that is to say, in the Palace of Hormisdas.¹² Taking no chances, he arranged for the papal legates then in Constantinople to further press his claim on the pope. They suggested that the relics of each saint be sent in a separate casket.¹³ Pope Hormisdas replied positively on 2 September 519, so that Justinian would have the relics for his church by the end of the year.¹⁴ A contemporary witness, Procopius of Caesarea, confirms that Justinian built his church of Peter and Paul near the Palace of Hormisdas. It took the form of a longitudinal basilica, even though ecclesiastical architecture at Constantinople at that time was moving away from such design.¹⁵ Its dedicatory epigram singles out the building’s beauty and splendor, and indicates that it was dedicated by “Justinian” with no other epithet, thereby suggesting it was completed before his consulship in 521, and possibly even before he became magister militum in mid-520.¹⁶ Otherwise, the consulship might well have been included as a title for Justinian, as well as his generalship, which we find recorded in the dedication of the church of Theodorus around the same time.¹⁷ It has been further proposed, possibly correctly, that the church was built rather hastily.¹⁸ Still, in building a church on what was for the moment his own property Justinian was doing no more than other aristocrats before him, most recently Anicia Juliana with her magnificent church of St. Polyeuctus.¹⁹

While he lived in the Palace of Hormisdas, Justinian’s advancement continued. There was no more senior court position available for him than magister militum, but he was progressively installed with the highest honorific titles. Step by step his status was increased.²⁰ In 523 he acquired the title of *patricius*, which finally put him on a par with the surviving nephews of the previous emperor Anastasius as well as with Olybrius, Anicia Juliana’s son, for whom she still harbored imperial ambitions.²¹ Shortly afterward Theodora, not yet Justinian’s wife, was made *patricia*. They were both now living in the Palace of Hormisdas.

¹² *Collectio Avellana* 187.5 (O. Günther, ed., *Epistulae imperatorum pontificum aliorum inde ab a. CCCLXII usque ad a. DLII datae Avellana quae dicitur collectio*, CSEL 35 [1895–98], 645).

¹³ Ibid. 218.1, 3 (CSEL 35:679–80).

¹⁴ Ibid. 190.4 (CSEL 35:648).

¹⁵ Procopius, *De aedificiis* 1.4.1, with Bardill, *Brickstamps*, 34 (n. 6 above).

¹⁶ *Anthologia Palatina* 1.8, line 2.

¹⁷ Ibid. 1.97, line 4: “στρατιῆς ἡγήτορι πάσης”; 1.98, line 2: “μεγασθενέος στρατιάρχου.” For his inclusion in the dedication of Theodorus: Al. Cameron, “Theodorus τρισέπαρχος,” *GRBS* 17 (1976):

278–79. For Theodorus and the dating of his church to exactly 520: ibid., 274–83.

¹⁸ Mango, “Alleged Tradition,” 189 (n. 3 above).

¹⁹ Cf. C. Mango, “The Development of Constantinople as an Urban Centre,” in *The 17th International Byzantine Congress: Main Papers* (New Rochelle, 1986), 127–28 (repr. in Mango, *Studies* [n. 3 above]).

²⁰ For details: B. Croke, “Justinian under Justin: Reconceptualising a Reign” *BZ* 100 (2007), and “Procopius’ Secret History: Rethinking the Date,” *GRBS* 46 (2005): 405–32.

²¹ Victor of Tonnuna, *Chronicon* 107:

s.a. 523 (CCSL 173a:35 = MGH *AA* 11:197).

Other references to Justinian as patrician: Cyril of Scytopolis, *Vita Sabas* 68 (ed. E. Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis*, TU 49.2 [1939], 170.20ff.); *Chronicon Edessenum*, s.a. 836 (ed. and trans. I. Guidi, CSCOSyr 3.4 [1903], 10); John of Ephesus, *Vitae sanctorum orientalium* 13 (ed. and trans. E. W. Brooks, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, in *PO* 17.1 [1923]: 189); John of Nikiu, *Chronicon* 90.16–18.

Two years later he received the rare title *nobilissimus*, an honor confined to children or, in this case, adopted children of the emperor.²² Then in 525, at the request of the senate, the aging emperor Justin reluctantly elevated his nephew to the position of junior emperor, or *caesar*.²³ To have been inaugurated as caesar in 525 Justinian must have been considered the designated heir, now with sufficient authority and presence to be the next *augustus*. The caesar was in effect a “second emperor” (*δεύτερος βασιλεὺς*), having all the trappings and apparel of an emperor but not the full crown. The title and position did constitute, however, the unassailable guarantee of succession.²⁴ Becoming caesar entailed a distinctive inaugural ritual involving the senior emperor and all the court officials.²⁵ A caesar immediately created a separate court ceremonial with associated dignitaries. To express his elevated status, a caesar needed his own palace for himself and family, his own staff and resources, his own ceremonial. So in 525 the Palace of Hormisdas, where Justinian had already lived for seven years, took on new significance and possibly required modification as the palace of a reigning caesar. In April 527, with Justin’s health now deteriorating, Justinian became coemperor (*augustus*), then sole emperor a few months later following Justin’s death in August 527. Justinian always dated his reign, however, from 1 April 527. As *augustus* for the next thirty-eight years Justinian continued to build churches in Constantinople and beyond, including Holy Apostles and St. Irene, SS. Cosmas and Damian, and the grandest and most ambitious of all, Hagia Sophia. His name was associated with nearly every building project carried out during his reign. As he decreed in 538, any new church should reflect the emperor’s majesty and piety.²⁶

During the nine years of Justin’s reign Justinian was actively involved in building and refurbishing other churches at Constantinople besides SS. Peter and Paul. Sometimes he must have been engaged with several projects simultaneously. Some of the churches, constructed mainly in the fourth century, commemorating local or nearby martyrs, Justinian rebuilt completely or refurbished. They include St. Acacius, St. Plato,

²² Marcellinus, *Chronicon*, s.a. 527 (ed. T. Mommsen, MGH. AA 11:102); Zonaras, *Chronographia* 14.5.37 (ed. L. Dindorf, *Ioannis Zonarae Epitome historiarum* [Leipzig, 1868–75], 150.15). For the ceremony surrounding the conferring of the title: Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De ceremoniis* 2.53 (ed. A. Vogt, *Le livre des cérémonies* [Paris, 1935–40], 1.33–36, with commentary at 50–52.).

²³ Victor of Tonnuna, *Chronicon* 109: s.a. 525 (CCSL 173a:35 = MGH. AA 11:197).

²⁴ Caesar: A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1964), 322–23; R. Guillard, “Le César,” *Recherches sur les institutions byzantines* (Amsterdam, 1967), 2:25–43; G. Rösch, *ΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΑΣ: Studien zur offiziellen Gebrauch der Kaisertitel in spätantiker und frühbyzantinischer Zeit* (Vienna, 1978), 36–37. The caesar’s role is neatly summarized in *Vita Marcelli* 34 (ed. G. Dagron, “La Vie ancienne de saint Marcel l’Acémète,” AB 86 [1968]: 316–17): “Ο δὲ τούτῳ ἔχων τὸ ἀξίωμα δεύτερός ἐστιν

βασιλεὺς.... Ο καίσαρ τοίνυν, καὶ ἄχρι περίεστιν δὲ βασιλεὺς πάντα κοινῇ πράττων μετ’ αὐτοῦ, καὶ τελευτήσαντος μόνος τὴν βασιλείαν κρατεῖ, μηδενὸς δὲ πρὸ αὐτοῦ μηδὲ σὺν αὐτῷ τολμῶντος ἐκείνην λαβεῖν.”

²⁵ Coronation: Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De ceremoniis* 2.52 (Vogt ed., 1:31).

²⁶ Novella 67, cf. Procopius, *De aedificiis* 1.8.5.

St. Mocius, St. Thecla (near the Harbor of Julian), and St. Thyrus, as well as others outside the city, notably the monastery of St. Theodore at Resion and St. Theodota's church at the Hebdomon.²⁷ From the same period he is also credited with other substantial constructions, such as the Church of the Virgin at Blachernae, one of the most celebrated churches dedicated to the Virgin in the Byzantine world. According to Procopius, Justinian altered and improved the original basilical building by giving it a dome supported by columns forming a semicircle.²⁸ There is also another church not mentioned by Procopius, the Melete, for which Justinian is given some credit in its dedicatory epigrams dating from Justin's reign.²⁹

At some point during his imperial career, which had begun in 525, the church of SS. Sergius and Bacchus was built within the Hormisdas precinct, where Justinian lived between 518 and August 527. Overlooking the Sea of Marmara, a little south of the hippodrome, the church still survives, although considerably modified over the years.³⁰ The church is octagonal but built within a rectangle and enclosed by a dome. The irregularity of the building, both in orientation and symmetry, can be explained by either sloppy workmanship or the exigencies of accommodating the design to the preexisting church that it abutted.³¹ Procopius clearly credits Justinian with the construction of the church and describes its interior as shining with polychrome marble and splendid mosaic decoration standing out on a gold background.³² Its marble and mosaics have disappeared but its inscription honoring St. Sergius remains intact. Even in its present, decoratively spare form this church is still one of the city's finest monuments. Yet, a teasing question remains. When was it built?

It is generally agreed that SS. Sergius and Bacchus cannot have been completed any earlier than August 527, when Justinian became sole augustus. This is the clear implication, so it is argued, of the church's entablature inscription, which mentions Justinian as "emperor" (*σικηπτοῦχος*). Nor can the date of construction be later than the Constantinople synod of bishops in May 536, the first datable documentation of the church's existence. Mango contended that the church's date was closer to 536, since it was begun only after Justinian and Theodora had vacated the Palace of Hormisdas, in 527, and was

²⁷ Procopius, *De aedificiis*, 1.4.25–29; Acacius (Janin, *Églises*, 18 [n. 2 above]); Plato (ibid., 418); Mocius (ibid., 367–71); Thyrus (ibid., 257); Theodore (ibid., 157–58); Thecla (ibid., 149); Theodota (ibid., 153).

²⁸ Janin, *Églises*, 169–79.

²⁹ *Anthologia Palatina* 1.97–98 with D. Feissel, "Les Édifices de Justinien au

témoignage de Procope et de l'épigraphie," *Antiquité Tardive* 8 (2000): 88–89.

³⁰ For detailed description: van Millingen, *Churches*, 70–83; Ebersolt and Thiers, *Églises*, 21–51; Mathews, *Byzantine Churches*, 242–59 (all n. 2 above). Possibly Procopius was referring to the two churches within the Hormisdas mansion when he

accused Justinian of wasting the treasury's resources on "senseless buildings on the sea" (*Anecdota* 19.6; cf. 8.7–8).

³¹ Mango, *Architecture*, 59 (n. 1 above).

³² *De aedificiis*, 1.4.1–8.

therefore “not a precursor, but a contemporary” of Hagia Sophia.³³ He proposed further that the church of SS. Sergius and Bacchus was built by the empress Theodora expressly for the use of Monophysite monastic refugees who had fled persecution in the East.³⁴ According to John of Ephesus a large number of these arrived at Constantinople at some stage and were settled in the imperial Palace of Hormisdas, where Justinian and Theodora no longer dwelt.

The case against Mango’s position was immediately sketched in summary form by Krautheimer, then Mango produced a detailed response that has largely won the day.³⁵ While Krautheimer had identified most of the key weaknesses in Mango’s proposal, the impact of his argument was lost because he never developed his objections systematically and in detail. Bardill later acknowledged the strength of some of Krautheimer’s arguments, while reinforcing Mango’s thesis of a church founded to meet the needs of refugee Monophysites.³⁶ Where Mango had argued, however, that the church of SS. Sergius and Bacchus is to be identified with the *martyrium* located by John of Ephesus in a large room of the Palace of Hormisdas, Bardill has proposed that the new church was not the martyrium but the separate vaulted building that John describes as replacing the martyrium after it had collapsed. The new church was needed, so it is argued, because the Monophysite monks in the Palace of Hormisdas were now without a hall for prayer, and its elaborate design is to be explained by “Justinian’s desire to court the Monophysite dignitaries who were then [i.e., in 532] present in Constantinople.”³⁷ Given this clear impetus for the construction of SS. Sergius and Bacchus, it is dated by Mango and Bardill to the early 530s.³⁸ Most recently, Shahîd has downplayed the role of Theodora in the church’s construction, proposing instead that its rationale and its dedication to the eastern military saint Sergius were provided by the outbreak of Justinian’s war against the Persians, and particularly by the commemoration of the Roman victory over the Persians at Dara in 530. However, Shahîd continues to see the church as playing a key role in Theodora’s promotion of Monophysites and Justinian’s quest for doctrinal reconciliation with them.³⁹

The notion that this residency of the Monophysite monks in the Palace of Hormisdas gave rise to the original construction of the church of SS. Sergius and Bacchus depends entirely on a single chapter of the *Lives of the Eastern Saints* written by John of Ephesus. In interpreting it

³³ “Alleged Tradition,” 192; cf. “Once Again,” 386 (ca. 535), 392 (between 531 and 536; both n. 3 above).

³⁴ “Once Again,” 392.

³⁵ Krautheimer, “Sergius and Bacchus” (n. 3 above); Mango, “Once Again.”

³⁶ “Refugees,” 1–11 (n. 3 above).

³⁷ Ibid., 9.

³⁸ Dates proposed: toward 536 (Mango, “Alleged Tradition,” 192); 535 or earlier (idem, “Once Again,” 386); after 531 (ibid., 394); possibly 527–33 (Bardill, “Refugees,”

4); 530–36, possibly 530–33 (ibid., 9–10).

³⁹ “Sergios and Bakhos,” 479–80 (n. 5 above).

both Mango and Bardill have assumed that John describes events from the late 520s into the 530s, and that by then there were already very large numbers of Monophysite monks in Constantinople requiring accommodation.⁴⁰ This is a mistaken assumption. Neither Mango nor Bardill has distinguished sufficiently between the two distinct phases in the persecution of Monophysites in the East, each with quite different consequences for the persecuted: one in the early to mid 520s, the other from 536/37. For both phases John of Ephesus, a contemporary, is the essential witness. Clarifying the nature and timing of the imperial action against the Monophysites reopens fundamental questions about the date, purpose, and original context of the church.

Persecution of Monophysites in the 520s

John of Ephesus, who spent part of his life at Constantinople, provided an eyewitness account of how Justinian's Palace of Hormisdas was transformed into a monastery at an unspecified date. He had known the city over a long period since his first visit to Constantinople in 535. In a chapter of his *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, written between 565 and 567, John describes "the community of blessed men which was gathered together in the royal city by the believing queen at the time of the persecution, out of many peoples and various local tongues."⁴¹ He goes on to say that there were about five hundred monks in the city, a striking array of ascetics drawn from Syria and Armenia, Cappadocia and Cilicia, Isauria and Lycaonia, Asia and Alexandria, and from Constantinople itself. To enter the Palace of Hormisdas, where a large number of them resided, was to step "into a great and marvellous desert of solitaries, and marvel at their numbers, and wonder at their venerable appearance, and the same men's honoured old age, and be affected by the crucifixion of their bodies and their practices of standing and the same men's spiritual songs which were heard from all sides, and at their marvellous canticles and their melancholy voices which were performed and uttered in all the chambers and courts and cells and halls of that palace." There were displaced stylites, recluses, and solitaries all trying to find peace and isolation within the space of the palace. It was crowded but orderly, with the monks in one of the main halls functioning as one convent and governed accordingly. Other parts of the palace were occupied by solitaries in cells. What took place there were "severe

⁴⁰ Mango, "Alleged Tradition," 192 n. 10 (refugee monks in Constantinople from 527); idem, "Once Again," 386 (from 531); Bardill, "Refugees," 6 (from 527), similarly in A. Voöbus, *A History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient* (Louvain, 1958), 3:212. The notion that 500 monks were occupying the Palace

of Hormisdas as early as 531 appears to have originated with L. Duchesne, "Les protégés de Théodora," *Mémoires de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 35 (1915): 59 and *L'église au VIe siècle* (Paris, 1925), 81. Krautheimer, "Sergius and Bacchus," 252 had pointed out that such a large number of monks could not have been concentrated

in Constantinople before 537, but he did not elaborate.

⁴¹ John of Ephesus, *Vitae sanctorum orientalium* 47 (*PO* 18:676–77). All translations of this text by Brooks.

labours and protracted fasts and constant vigils and perpetual prayers, as well as celebrations and descents of the Spirit in every place.”⁴² No wonder these ascetics attracted considerable local interest.

Certain implications of John’s detailed and reliable account need immediate elucidation:

1. In accordance with the strictly segregated monastic rule of the time, the Hormisdas monastery was for males only, functioning as a single monastic house under a single leader.⁴³

2. Also in accord with monastic strictures and Justinian’s own decree it was set up, both with a single open sleeping area that could accommodate common meals—a requirement ideally met by a large open hall such as that at Hormisdas—as well as with private cells, specially provided for solitaries through partitions and other means.⁴⁴

3. The community was diverse and can have been brought together only over time and only through threats of persecution that reached as far as the isolated solitaries of the Syrian desert. It was clearly not the result of a single massive influx from a single region, and it was neither a makeshift emergency arrangement nor a refugee camp.⁴⁵

4. Once established, its novelty and spiritual power attracted a constant stream of visitors. The manifest holiness demonstrated by the residents of the Hormisdas monastery impressed Chalcedonians and Monophysites alike. Moreover, Theodora is given credit for turning over her former residence, although John acknowledged that she had the clear support of Justinian. The emperor himself, according to John, who was in a position to know, was also a frequent visitor to the monastery.

5. At the time of writing his *Lives* John was himself the head of the Monophysite community resident throughout Constantinople, so his description is an informed one.⁴⁶

The first persecution of Monophysites by the imperial government began early in the reign of Justin. From the outset the emperor’s policy was clearly focused on restoring and maintaining orthodox belief. The immediate exile in 518 of Severus, patriarch of Antioch, symbolized the court’s intent. Further pressure was applied by Pope Hormisdas. Yet, it is clear that Justin’s own approach to Monophysites in the eastern provinces was not all that heavy handed. The successive patriarchs

⁴² Ibid., 677–79.

⁴³ Justinian, *Novella* 5.3 (535), reiterated in 133.1 (539) and 123.36 (544). See also H. S. Alivisatos, *Die kirchliche Gesetzgebung des Kaisers Justinian I* (Berlin, 1913; repr. Aalen, 1973), 105–12.

⁴⁴ Justinian, *Novella* 5.3 (535): “volumus enim nullum monasterium sub dictione nostra

constitutum sive paucorum, monachos, qui ibi sunt, divisos ab alterutris esse et propriis habitationibus uti, sed communiter quidem eos comedere sancimus. Dormire vero omnes in communi, unoquoque quidem in quadem propria stratura iacente, in domo vero uno collocatos....”

⁴⁵ As proposed by Krautheimer, “Sergius

and Bacchus,” 252.

⁴⁶ Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle* 9.30.7, 9.32, 10.19 (ed. and trans. J.-B. Chabot [Paris, 1899–1924], 2.257, 268, 353), with E. Honigmann, *Évêques et évêchés monophysites d’Asie antérieure au VIe siècle* (Louvain, 1951), 210.

of Antioch, however, took a much harder line.⁴⁷ As John of Ephesus explains, the settlement in 519 of the long-running schism with Rome created new resolution for the orthodox emperor Justin as he sought to bring the East to heel. John describes opposition at Constantinople in general terms before explaining events in the East.⁴⁸ The persecution was sudden and violent, with troops deployed to arrest and imprison monks.⁴⁹ At John's abode of Amida the bishop Mare was exiled to Petra. John clearly blames Paul, the new Antiochene patriarch, for the severity of the persecution throughout the East. Then he elaborates on the impact of Paul's actions on the monasteries, again giving the impression that the result was momentous for monks scattered far and wide throughout the East.⁵⁰ Paul's aggressive approach to suppressing the Monophysites was ended when he was replaced in 521 by Euphrasius, who continued the persecution until he lost his life in Antioch's devastating earthquake in May 526. Indeed, some saw his demise as divine retribution. At Edessa, meanwhile, the general Pharesmanes and his troops continued to expel monks, who eventually settled east in Mardin, and in nearby Tella; the bishop John supported those driven into the desert by increasing the number of ordinations.⁵¹ John's testimony is reinforced by another detailed firsthand account, the *Church History* of the writer known as pseudo-Zachariah. It was only in or just after August 527, when Justinian and Theodora had vacated the Palace of Hormisdas, that the persecution subsided. The influence of Theodora was clearly crucial in the decision that those who had been exiled for years were now allowed to return to their monasteries.⁵² Again, according to John of Ephesus, "after about six and a half years, thanks to the endeavors of the empress Theodora, Belisarius received an order to allow them [the monks of Edessa] to come back to their

⁴⁷ John of Ephesus, *Vitae sanctorum orientalium* 13 (PO 17:187) with A. Vasiliev, *Justin the First: An Introduction to the Epoch of Justinian the Great* (Cambridge, MA, 1950), 226ff., and L. van Rompay, "Society and Community in the Christian East," in Maas, *Justinian*, 241–44 (n. 1 above).

⁴⁸ Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, *Chronicon* 17–18 (trans. W. Witakowski, *Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, Chronicle, Known Also as the Chronicle of Zuqnin, Part III* [Liverpool, 1996], 19), taken more or less verbatim from the second (lost) part of the *Historia ecclesiastica* of John of Ephesus; see W. Witakowski, "The Sources of Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahre for the Second Part of His Chronicle," in *Leimon: Studies Presented to Lennart Ryden on his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. J. O. Rosenqvist

(Uppsala 1996), 181–210.

⁴⁹ Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, *Chronicon* 24–26 (trans. Witakowski, 25–27);

John of Ephesus, *Vitae sanctorum orientalium*

5 (PO 17:95–105). For the 521 persecution:

W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement* (Cambridge, 1972), 247–49.

⁵⁰ John of Ephesus, *Vitae sanctorum orientalium* 24 (PO 18:512–21, treating John of Tella); *Historia ecclesiastica*, pt. 2, frag. A (trans. W. J. Van Douwen and J. P. N. Land,

Joannis episcopi Ephesi commentarii de beatis orientalibus; et Historiae ecclesiasticae fragmenta [Amsterdam, 1889], 217–19); pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, *Chronicon* 19–24 (trans. Witakowski 21–24).

⁵¹ Expulsion: John of Ephesus, *Historia ecclesiastica*, pt. 2, frag. B (trans. Van Douwen and Land, 219–20); pseudo-Dionysius of

Tel-Mahre, *Chronicon* 27–29 (trans.

Witakowski). John of Tella: John of Ephesus, *Vitae sanctorum orientalium* (PO 18:514ff.) with S. A. Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis* (Berkeley, 1990), 100–103.

⁵² Pseudo-Zachariah of Mytilene,

Historia ecclesiastica 8.5; pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, *Chronicon* 29 (trans.

Witakowski, 30); *Chronicon ad annum 1234*,

54 (trans. I.-B. Chabot, *Chronicum anonymum ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens*, CSCOSyr 3.14 [Louvain, 1937; repr. 1952], 151.12–14) with Harvey, *Asceticism*, 67–68.

monastery.” That takes us to 528/29, when Belisarius was magister militum in the East.

The only time Constantinople comes into view during these years is for the monk Stephen, who had joined the exiled bishop Mare at Petra. Around 524/25 he was sent to Constantinople by Mare to negotiate a more congenial place of exile. By now Theodora “the patrician” was married to the court general Justinian and they both lived in the Palace of Hormisdas.⁵³ Her position and influence with Justinian and the emperor Justin led to Mare being resettled in Egypt, not in Constantinople. Stephen accompanied him. When Mare died in 529, Stephen once more set out for Constantinople, this time to secure Theodora’s permission to return Mare’s body to Amida.⁵⁴ A couple of years later, that is, in the early 530s, Theodora dispatched an imperial messenger (*magistrianos*) with a letter inviting Stephen to “come up to the capital in order to be with her in the palace because of his eloquence and his conversation and wisdom, and moreover because he also lived a pure life and after the manner of a solitary.” John of Ephesus had probably seen Theodora’s letter, because he was planning with Stephen to journey to Egypt at the time. Stephen then decided to go by way of Constantinople and John accompanied him as far as Antioch, where they parted.⁵⁵ As events turned out, Theodora prevailed upon Stephen to remain in the capital, where John met up with him once more in 535. There Stephen had set up a renowned cell for himself, dispensing blessings and charity to all, not unlike the example of Daniel the Stylite decades before. Stephen is the first monk known to have been protected by Theodora in Constantinople and this happened in the early 530s. He was never part of a large community of Monophysite monks. Instead, he remained the court’s celebrity solitary until he succumbed to the plague in 542.⁵⁶

Not only were monks on the move after 519, but many bishops too. John of Ephesus includes in his account of the persecution of the 520s a list of all the bishops who were forced to leave their sees at that time. Most found refuge in neighboring territory or joined Severus in the more sympathetic environment of Alexandria.⁵⁷ Of the fifty-four exiled bishops he notes that only two arrived in the imperial capital: Thomas of Damascus and Theosebeios of Ephesus, who died only three

⁵³ Theodora took an early interest as patricia (John of Ephesus, *Vitae sanctorum orientalium* 13 [PO 17:189–90]; pseudo-Zachariah of Mytilene, *Historia ecclesiastica* 8.5; pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, *Chronicon* 30–32 [trans. Witakowski, 30–32]), but not as an overt supporter of monophysites, as noted by V.-L. Menze,

“The Making of a Church: The Syrian Orthodox in the Shadow of Byzantium and the Papacy” (PhD diss., Princeton, 2004), 226–28.
⁵⁴ John of Ephesus, *Vitae sanctorum orientalium* 13 (PO 17:195); pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, *Chronicon* 31–32 (trans. Witakowski, 31–32).

⁵⁵ John of Ephesus, *Vitae sanctorum orientalium* 13 (PO 17:207).

⁵⁶ Ibid. (PO 17:211–12).

⁵⁷ Ibid. 13 (PO 17:189–90).

days after his arrival.⁵⁸ Otherwise, Constantinople is not mentioned in the course of these years of persecution. Given both its sheer distance and the religious policy of the emperor Justin, the imperial capital was not easily accessible, nor was it likely to be a welcome refuge in the 520s. There is no evidence of any large-scale arrival of Monophysite monks there during these years. Occasionally, individual bishops such as Thomas and monks such as Stephen found their way to the capital, by invitation or coercion. Yet, up to 530 or so there was simply no need to find a suitable home in Constantinople for hundreds of displaced Monophysite monks. Even if large numbers of monks had arrived in the imperial capital during the height of the persecution from 519 to 526, there would not have been room for them in the Palace of Hormisdas, which was then occupied by Justinian, Theodora, and their household.

Persecution after the Synod of Constantinople in 536

From about 530, when Justinian relaxed the court's hostile approach to Monophysites, he focused on solving the problem of doctrinal dissent and disharmony by finding a path to unity between orthodox and Monophysites. He conscientiously sought a single theological formula that would be meaningful and acceptable to both sides.⁵⁹ As part of this quest he invited to Constantinople bishops recently returned from exile⁶⁰ and arranged further consultations between theologians.⁶¹ The most significant of these discussions took place over a three-day period in 532 in the Palace of Hormisdas.⁶² This is the first mention of Justinian and Theodora's former residence since they moved into the imperial palace in 527. It was obviously a convenient location for such discussions in that it could accommodate the disputants and their entourages for a few days. The discussions involved six eminent orthodox bishops and six Monophysite bishops. That does not make the palace a special preserve of Monophysites by 532, as suggested by Mango.⁶³ If nothing else Justinian was anxious to be seen as scrupulously evenhanded. He was hoping the Monophysites could be persuaded to change sides.

⁵⁸ Elias, *Life of John of Tella*, fol. 93 (trans. E. W. Brooks, *Vitae virorum apud monophysitas celeberrimorum*, CSCOSyr 3.25 [1955], 59); pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, *Chronicon* 20 (trans. Witakowski, 20); *Chronicon ad AD 846*, fols. 225–28 (trans. J. Chabot, *Chronica minora*, CSCOSyr 3.4.2 [1904], 171.32–173.29). For the bishops and their sees: Honigmann, *Évêques*, 146–48 (n. 46 above).

⁵⁹ For background: P. Maraval, "La politique religieuse de Justinien," in *Les Églises*

d'Orient et d'Occident, ed. L. Pietri, *Histoire du Christianisme* 3 (Paris, 1998), 399–409; P. Allen, "The Definition and Enforcement of Orthodoxy," in *Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 14, *Late Antiquity: Empire and Successors, AD 425–600*, ed. Av. Cameron, B. Ward-Perkins, and M. Whitby (Cambridge, 2000), 811–34; P. Gray, "The Legacy of Chalcedon," in Maas, *Justinian*, 215–38 (n. 1 above).

⁶⁰ Pseudo-Zachariah of Mytilene, *Historia ecclesiastica* 9.15; *Chronicon ad AD 846*, 169.34–170.11 (Chabot ed.).

⁶¹ Harvard Syr. 22.3: "After this the order (came) for the two parties to assemble in the hall known as Beth Hormisdas, which is today joined to the Palace"; S. Brock, "The Conversations with the Syrian Orthodox under Justinian (532)," *OCP* 47 (1981): 92–93. The location is also mentioned in the record of the conversations circulated by Innocent of Marona; see n. 8 above.

⁶² "Once Again," 392 (n. 3 above).

Some did. The exiled patriarch of Antioch, Severus, was not among the bishops who met in the heptaconch dining hall of the Palace of Hormisdas in 532. Eventually he was pressured by the emperor and his wife to join in discussions at Constantinople and arrived late in 534, his safety guaranteed by Theodora.⁶³ Shortly after, the attempt to create some sort of unity collapsed. Two laws issued in March 533 had targeted adherents of the doctrines of Nestorius and Eutyches, but had left most Monophysites untouched.⁶⁴

According to the hypotheses advanced by Mango and Bardill, it is in this period of relative quiet between 531 and 536, in fact after the accession of Justinian in 527, that the Monophysite monks flooded into Constantinople from the East, thereby creating the need for a makeshift monastery for hundreds of them in the Palace of Hormisdas, as well as the construction of a new church dedicated to St. Sergius to meet their liturgical needs.⁶⁵ In fact, Mango proposed that the church was built precisely for those Monophysites who had taken part in the discussions with the orthodox in 532, hence its construction stretched over the next few years.⁶⁶ Yet the period from 531 to 536 is the least likely time for such an influx of monks. There was relative peace in the East during those years. John of Ephesus, for example, describes how at Amida the monks returned to their monasteries in the late 520s, remaining there for several years before persecution was renewed. As Frend summed it up, “The years 531–536 are the years of the great truce between adherents and opponents of Chalcedon throughout the east, when persecution ceased and each side rested on its position.”⁶⁷ An exception was the stylite Z’ura, who came from Amida to Constantinople in 535 after being forced down from his column. He was accompanied by ten disciples. After disputatious meetings with Justinian and Theodora, as well as local nobles and bishops, he was provided with a villa at Sycae and later removed to Thrace.⁶⁸

The situation was to change in 536 after the synod at Constantinople in May and June, led by the city’s new patriarch, Menas. He had recently replaced Anthimus, who had been forced to resign after failing to prove his unwavering support for the Chalcedonian cause. The conclusion of the synod was decisive: Severus was again exiled, others

⁶³ John of Ephesus, *Historia ecclesiastica*, pt. 3, 3.8 (ed. E. W. Brooks, CSCOSyr 3.3 [1936; repr. 1952]); *Vitae sanctorum orientalium* 48 (PO 18:687); pseudo-Zachariah of Mytilene, *Historia ecclesiastica* 9.19; *Chronicon ad AD 846*, 223 (Chabot ed.); Evagrius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 4.10 (protected by Theodora).

⁶⁴ *Codex Justinianus* 1.1.6, 7.

⁶⁵ Mango, “Once Again,” 386; Bardill, “Refugees,” 6 (n. 3 above).

⁶⁶ “Once Again,” 392: “As a further gesture of good will, the splendid martyrium of Mar Sergius was built for their benefit, hence between 531 and 536.” Cf. Bardill, “Refugees,” 6.

⁶⁷ *Rise*, 269 (n. 49 above).

⁶⁸ John of Ephesus, *Vitae sanctorum orientalium* 2 (PO 17:21–35) with Harvey, *Asceticism*, 84 (n. 51 above).

too.⁶⁹ The synod also nudged Justinian into a firmer doctrinal position, which is reflected in a detailed imperial decree giving unprecedented force and clarity to the imperial intention to outlaw the opponents of Chalcedon.⁷⁰ On 2 May, at the first session of the council called to condemn the former patriarch of Constantinople Anthimus, it was discovered that he could not be located. Certain members of the council were then designated to search for him. They reported back to the second session on 6 May that their search had proved fruitless, including their inquiries at the Church of Peter and Paul at the Hormisdas palace.⁷¹ Thereupon a new search party was formed, with the same result reported to the third session, on 10 May, although they did not specify that they had looked anywhere within the Hormisdas palace complex. Yet another search party was then commissioned, which reported back to the fourth session, on 21 May. Theagenes, bishop of Synada, in Phrygia, explained to the assembled bishops and others that they had started at St. Sergius's church because Anthimus was known to have spent time there before he became patriarch, that is, before 535 but possibly in the late 520s.⁷² They found the church closed. Others confirmed Theagenes' report.⁷³ Anthimus was condemned in absentia. He did not resurface to make his peace with Justinian until after the death of Theodora, in 548. She had been hiding him in the palace.⁷⁴

After the synod at Constantinople in 536 the emperor promulgated a new law on 6 August that severely restricted the activities of Monophysites, expelling Anthimus, Severus, Peter, and the troublesome Z'ura. The situation for Monophysites now changed rapidly throughout the East, as Krautheimer observed.⁷⁵ The law specified that, at risk of strict punishment, followers of Severus were not to engage in discussion on the faith, nor to baptize or offer communion to anyone even if they requested it. This applied both in Constantinople ("in hac regia nostra civitate") and elsewhere. Any church where they preached would be confiscated from them, as was only just.⁷⁶ It was the patriarch

⁶⁹ E. Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire* (Paris, 1949), 380–83; Honigmann, *Évêques*, 152–54 (on Severus; n. 46 above); A. Grillmeier, with T. Hainthaler, *Christ in Christian Tradition* (London 1995), 2.2:346–55; Maraval, "Justinien," 406–7 (n. 59 above); J. Speigl, "Die Synode von 536 in Konstantinopel," *Ostkirchliche Studien* 43 (1994): 105–53.

⁷⁰ Justinian, *Novella* 42.

⁷¹ ACO 3:80 (159.12–28: "ἐν τοῖς Ὀρμίσδου ἐν τῷ ἀγίῳ ἀποστολεῖῳ"), and 82 (160.3: "ἐν τῷ ἀγίῳ ἀποστολείῳ τῷ δοντὶ ἐν τοῖς Ὀρμίσδου").

⁷² ACO 3:111 (174.30–38): "ἐν τῷ σεπτῷ εὐκτηρίῳ τοῦ ἀγίου μάρτυρος Σεργίου ἐν τοῖς

Ὀρμίσδου καὶ ζητούντων ἡμῶν Ἀνθιμὸν τὸν εὐλαβέστατὸν ἐπεδείχθη ἡμῖν οἶκος ἐνθα πρότερον τὰς διατριβὰς ἐλέγετο ἔχειν" (174.36–38). This possibly refers to the brief period in mid-535 immediately before he became patriarch. More likely, however, it refers to an even earlier period before Anthimus became bishop of Trebizond, which would clearly mean the church was completed much earlier. Since he took part in the discussions in the Hormisdas palace in 532 as the orthodox bishop of Trebizond (letter of Innocent in ACO 3:169.10], it could have been in the late 520s. Perhaps Anthimus had been a monk in the monastery there.

There was evidently no question about his orthodoxy at that stage, when he was renowned for his ascetic qualities (pseudo-Zachariah of Mytilene, *Historia ecclesiastica* 9.19).

⁷³ ACO 3:118 (175.20–21) and 115 (176.4–10).

⁷⁴ John of Ephesus, *Vitae sanctorum orientalium* 48 (PO 18:685–87).

⁷⁵ "Sergius and Bacchus," 252 (n. 3 above).

⁷⁶ Justinian, *Novella* 42.3.1–2.

of Antioch Ephraem who acted most swiftly and harshly throughout his jurisdiction. At Amida the local bishop Abraham bar Kaili was particularly zealous in seeking out Monophysites, then torturing and expelling them. The persecution quickly spread throughout the eastern provinces. Many were exiled and pressured. As pseudo-Zachariah expressed it, “and others they hunted and drove from country to country, among them the monks.”⁷⁷ John of Ephesus reports the new outbreak of persecution with greater attention to detail than previously, distinguishing this persecution from the previous one.⁷⁸ He even wrote a separate treatise about this persecution.⁷⁹ An obvious implication of John’s eyewitness record is that the persecuted Monophysites, especially the monks and nuns, were quickly exiled. In contrast to the situation in the 520s, they scattered far and wide. John of Tella, for example, was arrested and brought to Antioch, where he soon died a martyr’s death.⁸⁰ Other monks driven out of Amida were kept moving in a sort of tent city.⁸¹

On this occasion, again unlike the previous persecution in the 520s, many sought refuge in the imperial capital despite the lengthy and arduous journey. Constantinople was now an attractive option for refugees because they knew that Theodora could offer succor and Justinian would at least tolerate her actions, despite the intention and force of his own law. First there arrived Mari, Sergius, and Daniel, who all died in the imperial capital. Others such as Isaac and Paul continued at Constantinople to carry out their humble work of serving the poor and sick, while James impressed Theodora by the sanctity exhibited in his cell.⁸² Later, Hala from Edessa sought the succor of Theodora, “who had been gathering together persecuted men from all quarters and looking after them, in that they had been placed by her in the palace called Hormisda.”⁸³ Besides the provinces under the jurisdiction of the bishop of Antioch, persecution was also felt in Egypt. In December 536 a large number of monks arrived in Constantinople from Alexandria. They accompanied Theodosius, the Monophysite bishop of Alexandria, who came to Theodora before being exiled to Thrace.⁸⁴ Theodosius soon returned to Constantinople as head of

⁷⁷ *Historia ecclesiastica* 10.1; cf. Evagrius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 4.11; Jacob of Edessa, *Chronicon* (trans. E. W. Brooks, CSCOSyr 5 [1905; repr., 1955]), 242 with van Rompay, “Society,” 247 (n. 47 above). All translations of pseudo-Zachariah by F. J. Hamilton and E. W. Brooks, *The Syriac Chronicle Known As That of Zachariah of Mitylene* (London, 1899).

⁷⁸ *Historia ecclesiastica*, pt. 2, frag. C (Van Douwen and Land, 221–23); *Vitae sanctorum orientalium* 2.4 (PO 18:522–24),

35 (18:620–21), 58 (19:570–71); pseudo-Zachariah of Mytilene, *Historia ecclesiastica* 10.1; pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, *Chronicon* 32–44 (trans. Witakowski, 32–41).

⁷⁹ *Vitae sanctorum orientalium* 35 (PO 18:607); *Historia ecclesiastica*, pt. 2, frag. C (Van Douwen and Land, 221).

⁸⁰ John of Ephesus, *Vitae sanctorum orientalium* 2.4 (PO 18:522–23).

⁸¹ Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, *Chronicon* 30 (trans. Witakowski, 30).

⁸² Mari, Sergius, and Daniel: John of Ephesus, *Vitae sanctorum orientalium* 4.2 (PO 18:657); Isaac: ibid. 4.5 (PO 18:669); Paul: ibid. (PO 18:675); James: ibid. 4.9 (PO 18:691); Thomas: ibid. 2.1 (PO 17:208).

⁸³ Ibid. 3.3 (PO 18:600). Hala’s expulsion arose from the persecution commencing in 536 (ibid., PO 18:598 with n. 1).

⁸⁴ Ibid. 2.5 (PO 18:528–29); pseudo-Zachariah of Mytilene, *Historia ecclesiastica* 10.1.

the Monophysite community there; some of the Alexandrian monks remained in Constantinople, where they established monasteries and churches.⁸⁵ Some even resided in the monastery set up in the Palace of Hormisdas. Also from Egypt came Mare the solitary, who settled in his cell at Sycae, and John of Hephaestopolis, who sought expert help for an illness. Theodora housed him in the mansion of Anthemius.⁸⁶ As others continued to arrive from various parts, in 539 Justinian charged the newly appointed *quaesitor* with examining the credentials of monks and nuns who had recently arrived in Constantinople. Such scrutiny was then reinforced by another law forbidding the entry of any monk into the city without a letter of authorization from his local patriarch.⁸⁷ Following the initial influx in 537/38, the arrival of refugee monks at Constantinople was now to be carefully monitored and regulated.

John of Ephesus and the Hormisdas Palace Monastery

John of Ephesus returned to Constantinople in 540 and was housed in the mansion of Probus, the only surviving nephew of the emperor Anastasius and a well-known Monophysite.⁸⁸ This mansion was probably also set up as a monastery just like those of Hormisdas and Anthemius. While at the house of Probus he was joined for two years by the bishop Simeon, who died there. Many others he saw pass through in search of ordination.⁸⁹ John records that in 565/66 persecution was finally visited on the monasteries of both men and women in and around Constantinople. Some of them were well populated, “particularly so were those for females who had been expelled in the beginning from Antioch, Isauria, Cilicia, Cappadocia, and other regions, and who had been brought together by the empress Theodora, whose soul is at rest. Some of these communities numbered in excess of three hundred.”⁹⁰ Otherwise John does not mention any migration of holy women to Constantinople from Amida and elsewhere, although that clearly occurred. As we have seen, however, he does devote a separate chapter to “the great and marvellous desert of solitaries” that was housed in the Palace of Hormisdas, throughout every room and hall. There were monks from Alexandria as well as from his own region and further afield.⁹¹ According to John, writing in the period 565 to 567, thirty years had elapsed since this monastic community first started to

⁸⁵ Victor of Tonnuna, *Chronicon* 126: s.a. 540 (CCSL 173a:41 = MGH AA 11:199).

included Leontius (*ibid.* 39, PO 18:646)

and Abraham (*ibid.* 40, PO 18:648).

⁸⁶ John of Ephesus, *Vitae sanctorum orientalium* 25 (PO 18:531), 36 (PO 18:624–41).

⁹⁰ *Historia ecclesiastica*, pt. 3, 1.10 (Brooks, CSCOSyr 3.3:5). My translation, based on

Brooks's.

⁸⁷ Justinian, *Novella* 80, 86.8.

⁹¹ John of Ephesus, *Vitae sanctorum orientalium* 47 (PO 18:677–81).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 2.4 (PO 18:522); other visitors

form. In other words, it began in the aftermath of the persecution in 536, not earlier. For the time being, the emperor and empress had access to an unprecedented concentration of sanctity and spiritual power.

In the years between 536 and her death, in 548, Theodora presided over the consolidation at Constantinople of hundreds of monks set up in various places, including at the Palace of Hormisdas. Since ecclesiastical law required that monasteries be communal and open, the spacious aristocratic mansions of the imperial capital were well suited to accommodating large numbers of monks. We therefore find monastic groups in the houses of Probus, Placidia, and Anthemius, as well as in the imperial palace and the mansion of Hormisdas. Theodora's support for them was widely noted, but it was measured and it never contradicted Justinian's policies.⁹² John describes the "concourse of believers" gathered in the imperial capital by the 540s and speculates that Theodora was "perhaps appointed queen by God to be a support for the persecuted" who were able to find refuge at Constantinople.⁹³ Even so, Theodora knew there were limits. She could shelter and sustain, but she had no freedom or authority to advocate and promote. The emperor's overriding strategy was to co-opt her limited support of refugee ascetics into his public policy of containment and ecclesial suffocation. Confining them to designated mansions was part of that containment process. In addition, ordinations were forbidden, so that at one stage Theodora had to admonish John of Hephaestopolis, "Remain still and keep quiet like your companions and do not make priests in this city."⁹⁴ The very decree that set the persecution in motion in 536 severely restricted the activities of Monophysites at Constantinople.⁹⁵

This Monophysite monastery that was established in the Hormisdas palace after 536 has been identified by Mango and Bardill with another monastery that was already in the precinct of Hormisdas before 536, but not in the palace itself. In the documentary record of the synod at Constantinople in May and June 536 a certain Paul is listed as the leader of the monastery of "the holy apostles Peter and Paul and the martyrs Sergius and Bacchus" (*πρεσβύτερος καὶ ἡγούμενος τῶν ἀγίων Πέτρου καὶ Παύλου τῶν ἀποστόλων, Σεργίου καὶ Βάκχου τῶν μαρτύρων*), that is to say, a monastery associated with the two contiguous churches built on

⁹² Noted, for example, by Evagrius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 4.10. For the Monophysite tradition on Theodora: S. A. Harvey, "Theodora the 'Believing Queen': A Study in Syriac Historiographical Tradition," *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 4 (2001): 1–31, with observations in C. Pazdernik, "Our Most Pious Consort Given Us by God: Dissident Reactions to the Partnership of Justinian and Theodora, AD

525–548," *Classical Antiquity* 13 (1994): 271–81 and C. Foss, "The Empress Theodora," *Byzantion* (2002): 141–49.

⁹³ John of Ephesus, *Vitae sanctorum orientalium* 58 (PO 19:225); ibid. 25 (PO 18:529) with Duchesne, "Protégés," 57–79 (n. 40 above).

⁹⁴ John of Ephesus, *Vitae sanctorum orientalium* 25 (PO 18:534). Theodora provided bishops for the Arabs James and Theodore:

ibid. 50 (PO 19:154–55) with Menze, "Making," 239–42 (n. 53 above).

⁹⁵ Justinian, *Novella* 42.3.2.

Justinian's Hormisdas estate.⁹⁶ Paul formed part of a contingent of the heads of local monasteries that sought and were granted permission to present special petitions in person to the first two sessions of the synod on 2 and 6 May 536. Their petitions strongly supported the orthodox position. As a public advocate of orthodoxy before the synod Paul is highly unlikely to have been, or to be suspected of having been, an anti-Chalcedonian. Nor is there any need to assume that he must have been one, however secretly. At Constantinople the abbots of monasteries were approved and appointed by the patriarch.⁹⁷ It is improbable that in the early years of Justinian's reign a patriarch would have appointed anyone of dubious orthodoxy to head a monastery in a property intimately associated with the orthodox emperor. So, Mango's resort to the contention that Paul was actually a Monophysite but had cunningly changed sides, or was merely an "orthodox figurehead" for the purposes of the synod, is unnecessary, as is Bardill's claim that Paul was "forced to sign" the acts of the synod of 536.⁹⁸ No duress was involved. Moreover, Paul's signature was not to be found at all on the acts of the synod. Only the bishops present were eligible to sign. What Paul did sign were the petitions presented to the synod on behalf of the city's orthodox monasteries.

The reason that Paul has been viewed as a Monophysite manqué by Mango and Bardill is their contention that by the time of the synod in May 536 the Palace of Hormisdas had already been turned into a Monophysite monastery for hundreds of refugee monks and that this can have been the only monastery on the property. However, the conversion of the palace into a monastery for Monophysites cannot have commenced by May 536, as we have seen, so there is no difficulty in Paul being what he manifestly is in the record of the 536 synod—an orthodox head of an orthodox monastery. In addition, the monastery led by Paul was associated with both SS. Sergius and Bacchus and SS. Peter and Paul, thereby implying that by 536 there was a single monastery serving both the churches already established on the imperial estate and plainly associated with the orthodox.⁹⁹ According to Bardill's Monophysite hypothesis the church of Peter and Paul must

⁹⁶ See ACO 3:46.3–4. Otherwise the location of Paul's monastery is designated more simply as the monastery of "Peter near the palace" (*τοῦ ἀποστόλου Πέτρου πλησίον τοῦ παλατίου*), merely to distinguish it from other local monasteries named after Peter: 129.4, 158.3, 164.44, 173.22; cf. 144.39 (no location).

⁹⁷ Justinian, *Novella* 5.9 (535).

⁹⁸ Mango, "Once Again," 389, cf. 392: "nominally orthodox abbot"; Bardill,

"Refugees," 7, 10; contra Mathews, "Architecture," 24 (all n. 3 above).

⁹⁹ Krautheimer, "Sergius and Bacchus," 252 (n. 3 above), and Mathews, "Architecture," 24, see it as a separate monastery serving both churches and dating from their construction and located nearby, but Mango thinks otherwise. Bardill follows Krautheimer and Mathews. Monasteries could serve more than one church.

also have been set aside for the use of the Monophysites.¹⁰⁰ But this is decidedly unlikely given its strictly orthodox and Roman associations as the repository of relics of SS. Peter and Paul, supplied by Pope Hormisdas.

The mansion of Hormisdas remained an imperial residence, or at least was kept in imperial use, long after Justinian and Theodora moved to the nearby imperial palace.¹⁰¹ At some point after 532 the Palace of Hormisdas was structurally connected to the imperial palace complex, and continued to require the overall supervision of an official designated the *curator palatii Hormisdas*.¹⁰² Nevertheless, for a considerable part of Justinian's reign the palace functioned as a monastery for Monophysites, although over time it declined in numbers. During that time, so John explains, the community experienced two undated disasters that illustrated God's providence for the occupants. The first was the collapse, under the weight of a pressing crowd, of the floor of the large heptaconch dining hall, where the doctrinal discussions had been held in 532. It was now being used as a chapel. The din and damage were enormous. The worst was feared, but nobody was killed. Such obvious divine favor increased the honor of the monastic community at the Hormisdas palace, at least in John's view. Justinian had the space rebuilt as a portico.¹⁰³ According to Bardill, *azga*, the word for "portico" in the account of John of Ephesus, is better translated as a "vaulted roof" and can thereby refer to the church of Sergius and Bacchus.¹⁰⁴ If so then before May 536, indeed before 533 according to Bardill, the Hormisdas palace monastery must have been well established and full to overcrowded, the hall must have subsequently collapsed, and the new church of Sergius and Bacchus built to replace it must have been already completed. In reality these incidents—the collapse of the dining room and the erection of its replacement structure—cannot have occurred until the monks were well established there, that is, some time after 536 at the earliest, which is too late for the replacement structure to be identified with the church of St. Sergius. Furthermore, apart from the compressed chronology required for Bardill's hypothesis, John says explicitly that Justinian's new construction replaced the fallen hall (*triklinos*) in the very same space within the Palace of Hormisdas, not elsewhere outside it. The church, however, was physically separate

¹⁰⁰ "Refugees," 10.

¹⁰¹ The courtier Andrew was imprisoned there early in Justin II's reign (John of Ephesus, *Historia ecclesiastica*, pt. 3, 2.9 [CSCO 3.3:49–50]), and the wife and daughters of the new caesar Tiberius were lodged there in the later 570s. Tiberius would spend his evenings there with his family before

returning to the imperial palace in the morning (*ibid.* 3.3.7 [CSCO 3.3:97]; 3.6.28 [252]).

¹⁰² Structure: Procopius, *De aedificiis* 1.4.1–2. The connection must be dated some time after 532 since it was not completed by the time of the doctrinal discussions held there in 532 (Brock, "Conversations," 92 with n. 17 [n. 61 above]).

¹⁰³ John of Ephesus, *Vitae sanctorum orientalium* 47 (PO 18:681–83).

¹⁰⁴ "Refugees," 8–9, but acknowledging the tenuous nature of his hypothesis.

from the palace, as is made clear in the record of the 536 synod.¹⁰⁵ So the replacement structure built in the palace cannot be the church of SS. Sergius and Bacchus, even though the triklinos may well have been turned into a vaulted chapel as Bardill has proposed.

The other miracle story adduced by John concerns a fire that “God wrought in the place where this holy community was.” The ensuing narrative is somewhat disjointed and, as so often in John’s vitae, it is difficult to be certain of the exact sequence of locations in his story. He begins by noting, “After the death of the believing Theodora the queen [June 548], when this community had also lost some of its earlier numbers, the adversaries were stirred up with envy against it and induced the king [Justinian] to eject them from the former place and remove them to another place belonging to the crown called the House of Urbicius.” John begins this whole chapter by referring to “the community of the blessed men which was gathered together in the royal city by the believing queen at the time of the persecution, out of many peoples and various local tongues.” Theodora had indeed been responsible for protecting a large number of monks in Constantinople, over five hundred according to John, and they were spread across different locations. John then goes on to describe one of them, possibly the largest, which was in the Palace of Hormisdas. Most of the rest of this chapter is devoted to that particular community.

In the course of his account John explains that following Theodora’s death in 548 the emperor Justinian honored his promise to continue to protect the Monophysite monks. Indeed, “he supported the remnant of them even to the present time, which is the year 877 [= 565/66], that is, the remnant that was left of it to the present time.” In other words, not long before his death in November 565 Justinian was still protecting what John himself called a “remnant” of the monastic community that had first settled into the Palace of Hormisdas nearly thirty years earlier. Doubtless, after Theodora’s death Justinian found it difficult to keep the promise he had made to his wife, not only because of his own laws but also in the face of orthodox hostility toward the Monophysites in Constantinople. Hence John’s introduction to the story of the fire, in which he appears to say that, in response to unnamed adversaries, Justinian was induced “to eject them from the former place and remove them to another place,” which, from the sequence of John’s narrative, means from the Palace of Hormisdas to the palace of Urbicius near the Strategion.¹⁰⁶ So the remnant of the original Monophysite monastic community was now being supported by Justinian at the palace of Urbicius, with the Palace of Hormisdas being reclaimed by the emperor. Even so, the adversaries were not satisfied and at this new location they tried to corrupt the mainly elderly monks by introducing into the community married couples and “others who were not chaste.” Next, John

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Mango, “Once Again,” 385 n. 4 (n. 3 above).

¹⁰⁶ For its location: Janin, *Constantinople*, 400 (n. 11 above) and A. Berger, *Untersuchungen zur den Patria Konstantinopoleos* (Bonn, 1988), 404–6.

explains the consequence of this development: “Whereas these men thought to defile the saints’ dwelling, God purified it by a sudden fire, in that fire fell and burnt the whole of the place, only a small portion of it escaping....”¹⁰⁷

What John describes appears to be nothing less than a fire that sometime after 548 burned down most of the mansion of Urbicius, incinerating at least some of the provocative females who had come to lodge there. Finally, he comments on the aftermath: “And so at last it was given to the martyrs’ chapel of the holy Mar Sergius and a monastery was built on that spot; and it remains to the present time to the glory of God.”¹⁰⁸ Again, the sense is that on the site of the burned-out palace of Urbicius was built a small monastery for the remaining Monophysite monks, still functional in 566. Less clear is what John means by “it was given to the martyrs’ chapel of the holy Mar Sergius,” at a date that must have been sometime in the 550s. Either it was attached to the church of St. Sergius at the Palace of Hormisdas some time after the Monophysite monks had been expelled from there by the orthodox Justinian or, more likely, to some otherwise unknown church of Sergius closer to the Monophysite monastery at *ta Ourbikiou*.¹⁰⁹ If the former, that would still not make St. Sergius a church exclusively for Monophysites, whether then or earlier.

In this reading of John’s account, the fire does not occur in the same place as the previous disaster, the collapse of the hall in the Palace of Hormisdas. Mango and Bardill, however, have interpreted John as setting both stories in the same venue, so that the fire affected the community of Hormisdas and burned down most of that palace, presumably after the hall (identified by Bardill as the Church of Sergius and Bacchus) had been rebuilt following its previous collapse. Both Mango and Bardill state very clearly that the removal of the monks to the palace of Urbicius followed, rather than preceded, the fire.¹¹⁰ This cannot be so. John is quite explicit on the point.¹¹¹ Mango considers that St. Sergius’s church was built for the monks, and the new monastery was redesigned to replace the burned-out sections of the Hormisdas palace. Bardill proposes that the new monastery now constructed was for both churches and was in fact the first permanent monastic structure on the site, that is, on the questionable assumption that the monastery led

¹⁰⁷ John of Ephesus, *Vitae sanctorum orientalium* 47 (*PO* 18:683–84).

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. (*PO* 18:684).

¹⁰⁹ Perhaps that near the Cistern of Aetius, which commemorated its inauguration on 29 November each year, that is, assuming it was already constructed by the mid-sixth century (Janin, *Églises*, 470 [n. 2 above]).

¹¹⁰ Mango, “Sergius and Bacchus,” 192; “Once Again,” 386; Bardill, “Refugees,” 7 (all n. 3 above).

¹¹¹ As noted, for example, by Janin, *Constantinople*, 400.

by Paul in 536 was actually the Monophysite one within the physical confines of the palace.

The alternative, a possibility also recognized by Bardill, is far more likely, “that the Monophysites who were lodged in the Palace of Hormisdas had no link with the monastery of SS. Peter and Paul and SS. Sergius and Bacchus. But in that case an explanation would have to be found for the existence of an Orthodox monastery of SS. Peter and Paul and SS. Sergius and Bacchus not far from a community of refugee Monophysite monks....”¹¹² Quite so. The explanation for separate monasteries is self-evident: the orthodox monastery over which Paul presided in 536 served both of the churches built side by side by Justinian and must have been located nearby; the Monophysite monastery was established after 536 within the halls of the Palace of Hormisdas. It did not require, nor did it enjoy, access to the church of SS. Sergius and Bacchus. Its chapel was the main hall of the palace rebuilt in a more appropriate form, as Bardill has argued, following its collapse. The long-standing monastery of SS. Sergius and Bacchus and SS. Peter and Paul remained what it had always been, a monastery for orthodox monks. According to Malalas, it was to the Church of SS. Sergius and Bacchus that Pope Vigilius fled in 551 after Justinian sent soldiers to arrest the pope for imposing a period of penance on the patriarch Menas. The emperor’s men tried to drag him out but Vigilius hung onto the altar columns and eventually pulled them down, whereupon Justinian relented.¹¹³ At that time, the Monophysite monks were clearly not associated with the Church of Sergius or that of SS. Peter and Paul. The pope would hardly have sought security and refuge in a Monophysite stronghold. Thus, a connection with Monophysite refugees does not form part of the foundation story of St. Sergius and Bacchus’s church after all. We have to look elsewhere to locate the inspiration, as well as the background and likely date, of construction for Justinian’s church.

The Entablature Inscription

Churches such as SS. Sergius and Bacchus were erected over a period of several years. Where there are precise indications such as inscrip-

¹¹² “Refugees,” 10–11.

Stein, *Histoire*, 649 n. 1 [n. 69 above]).

¹¹³ John Malalas, *Chronographia* 18.111 (ed. I. Thurn, CFHB 35 [Berlin, 2000],

Vigilius himself says his place of refuge was the neighboring church of SS. Peter and Paul (“in beati Petri basilicam ad Ormisdam”:

411 = L. Dindorf CSHB 14–15 [Bonn, 1831], 485.4–7 with Tuscan Fragment 4.26–27); Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6039 (ed.

Letter 1, ed. E. Schwartz, “Vigiliusbriefe,” *Sitzungsberichte der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (1940), 2.22; cf. 3.13,

C. de Boor [Leipzig, 1883–85], 225.21–25); Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos, *Historia ecclesiastica* 17.26 (PG 45:281–84A). It is possible that Malalas is mistaken here (cf.

Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos, *Historia ecclesiastica* 17.26 (PG 45:281–84A). It is possible that Malalas is mistaken here (cf.

tions, monograms, or brickstamps at one or more levels, then different parts of a structure can be dated to different years. Otherwise, there is little certain knowledge about the organization and speed of building such a complex, richly decorated structure. Hagia Sophia, perhaps best known because of its current state of preservation, took over five years to build even with the imperial inclination for speed, a relatively uncluttered site, and the capacity to concentrate all the best available craftsmen on the task.¹¹⁴ The construction of other churches would have taken just as long or longer. For instance, Anicia Juliana's church of St. Polyeuctus, despite being smaller than Hagia Sophia, needed fifteen years, about ten of which were solidly devoted to building.¹¹⁵ SS. Sergius and Bacchus may well have taken seven to eight years, certainly two to three years at the very least.

Generally speaking, dedicatory inscriptions and carved epigrams represent the latest phase of a building's decoration. The elaborate epigrams of St. Polyeuctus were carved only toward the end of construction, when the interior was being finished off.¹¹⁶ Likewise, it would have been toward the end of the construction of SS. Sergius and Bacchus that the dedicatory epigram was carved into the octagonal nave entablature. The inscription, each line separated by a palmette, proclaims the patronage of Justinian and his wife Theodora, as follows:¹¹⁷

Ἄλλοι μὲν βασιλῆες ἐτιμήσαντο θανόντας
ἀνέρας, ὃν ἀνόνητος ἔην πόνος· ἡμέτερος δὲ
εὐσεβίην σικηπτοῦχος Ἰουστινιανὸς ἀέξων
Σέργιον αἰγλήντι δόμῳ φεράποντα γεραίρει
Χριστοῦ παγγενέταο· τὸν οὐ πυρὸς ἀτμὸς ἀνάπτων,
οὐ ξίφος, οὐχ ἐτέρη βασάνων ἐτάραξεν ἀνάγκη,
ἀλλὰ θεοῦ τέτληκεν ὑπὲρ Χριστοῖο δαμῆναι
αἴματι κερδαίνων δόμον οὐρανόν. ἀλλ᾽ ἐνὶ πᾶσιν
κοιρανίην βασιλῆος ἀκοιμήτοιο φυλάξοι
καὶ κράτος αὐξήσειε θεοστεφέος Θεοδώρης,
ἥς νόος εὐσεβίη φαιδρύνεται, ἥς πόνος αἰεὶ
ἀκτεάνων θρηπτῆρες ἀφειδέες εἰσὶν ἀγῶνες.

¹¹⁴ R. Mainstone, *Hagia Sophia: Architecture, Structure and Liturgy of Justinian's Great Church* (London, 1988), 150–57; Mango, *Architecture*, 18 (n. 1 above); van Millingen, *Churches*, 28–29 (n. 2 above); R. Taylor, *Roman Builders: A Study in Architectural Process* (Cambridge, 2003), 212–55.

¹¹⁵ R. Harrison, *Excavations at Sarayhan in Istanbul* (Princeton, 1986), 1:223 and A

Temple for Byzantium: The Discovery and Excavations of Anicia Juliana's Palace-Church in Istanbul (London, 1989), 71.

¹¹⁶ Harrison, *Temple*, 80; Connor, “Epigram,” 505 (n. 5 above).

¹¹⁷ Text: S. G. Mercati, “Epigraphica, II: Sulla tradizione manoscritta dell'iscrizione del fregio dei santi Sergio e Bacco di Costantinopoli,” *Atti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia*, ser. 3,

Rendiconti 3 (1925): 205, which improves on G. Kaibel, *Epigrammata Graeca* (1888; repr. Hildesheim, 1965), 1064 (p. 478) and van Millingen, *Churches*, fig. 20 (by A. E. Henderson). Translation: Mango, “Sergius and Bacchus,” 190, with an earlier translation in van Millingen, *Churches*, 73.

Other sovereigns have honored dead men whose labor was unprofitable, but our sceptered Justinian, fostering piety, honors with a splendid abode the Servant of Christ, Begetter of all things, Sergius; whom not the burning breath of fire, nor the sword, nor any other constraint of torments disturbed; but who endured to be slain for the sake of Christ, the God, gaining by his blood heaven as his home. May he in all things guard the rule of the sleepless sovereign and increase the power of the God-crowned Theodora whose mind is adorned with piety, whose constant toil lies in unsparing efforts to nourish the destitute.

This intricately carved epigram in St. Sergius's church was obviously sanctioned by Justinian and Theodora. Presumably they were also responsible for its precise content, although its recondite language required the services of a professional Greek versifier. Yet, despite their close involvement with the text, Justinian and Theodora are described in only the most general terms. There is no indication of their precise imperial rank and titulature. Justinian is just "our sceptered Justinian" (*ἡμέτερος...σκηπτοῦχος Ἰουστινίανος*) and "the sleepless sovereign" (*βασιλῆος ἀκοιμήτοιο*), while Theodora is "god-crowned" (*θεοστεφέος Θεοδώρης*).¹¹⁸ Each of these epithets is uncommon, especially in the verse epigrams on churches and other imperial buildings. *σκηπτοῦχος* is a Homeric appellation (e.g., *Iliad* 2.86; *Odyssey* 2.231) familiar to the educated onlookers of Constantinople, who could have seen it on a statue in the baths of Zeuxippus, for example (*Anthologia Palatina* 2 by the poet Christodorus). As for *θεοστεφέος*, it represents an early use of what was later to become a standard part of Byzantine imperial titulature. The only other extant instance from this period is applied to Justinian (*θεοστεφές*) on his statue at Antioch in Pisidia.¹¹⁹ Mango was inclined to see in the epigram a greater emphasis on Theodora's role than on Justinian's, and therefore a more active involvement by her in the planning and construction of the church, but this is an exaggeration.¹²⁰ It is no more Theodora's church than Justinian's. The two patrons are evenly weighed or, if anything, Justinian receives more emphasis. Theodora is singled out for her piety and support for the destitute, Justinian for his piety and for constructing a church for Sergius.

¹¹⁸ Mango ("Once Again," 388–89, relying on Procopius, *Anecdota* 12.20, 27 and John Lydus, *De magistratibus* 3.5.5) considered that *ἀκοιμήτοιο* might refer literally to Justinian's restless energy but it is more likely just a literary topos (Krautheimer, "Sergius and Bacchus," 253; cf. Bardill, "Refugees," 4 [both n. 3 above]).

¹¹⁹ C. Zuckerman, "The Dedication of a Statue of Justinian at Antioch," in *Actes du Ier congrès international sur Antioche de Pisidie*,

ed. T. Drew-Bear, M. Tashalan, and C. M. Thomas (Lyon–Paris 2002), 244.

¹²⁰ "Sergius and Bacchus," 190; "Once Again," 389 (both n. 3 above). Ebersolt and Thiers, *Églises*, 26 (n. 2 above), had earlier seen the Theodora reference as implying a monastery.

In any case, her pious activities in support of the destitute are otherwise well attested.¹²¹

In the case of SS. Sergius and Bacchus, the emperor Justin's nephew and his wife could claim credit for the church not least because it was built on their property. The way they are described in the epigram, however, suggests that at the time Justinian was indeed emperor or augustus ("sceptered"), while Theodora was empress or augusta ("God-crowned"). Even so, this need not necessarily mean, as it has always been construed, that the epigram can be dated only after August 527, when Justinian became sole emperor. It could equally apply to the period between April and August 527, when he ruled as coemperor with Justin and when the imperial couple still lived in the Palace of Hormisdas as augustus and augusta. If the epigram reflects the time when Justinian was only joint emperor and Theodora his consort, then there may be a particular significance in the way Theodora is described. In so publicly and permanently calling on Sergius to increase the power of Theodora (*καὶ κράτος αὐξήσει θεοστέφέος Θεοδώρης*), there may lie the expectation that one day she would be the wife of a sole emperor, thereby enjoying unrivaled power. On the other hand, this may be nothing more than a rhetorical *topos*. A further indication of the church's date of construction is to be found in the several monograms of Justinian and Theodora on the capitals: IOYCTINIANOT, BACIAEΩC, ΘΕΟΔΩΡΑC.¹²² These monograms are of the square, rather than the cross-shaped, type. Since cross-shaped monograms do not appear before the early 530s (initially at Hagia Sophia), then Sergius and Bacchus was most probably completed before 532, as Bardill noted.¹²³ Together, then, the entablature and the capitals permit a date for their carving as early as April 527, but how much earlier could the church have been planned and construction commenced?

It has always been considered highly unusual that Justinian would have begun to build a church such as SS. Sergius and Bacchus within a mansion he no longer occupied, that is, on the assumption that it was more or less entirely built after 527.¹²⁴ This problem evaporates if the church was planned and at least commenced, if not largely completed, before the death of the emperor Justin in August 527. In that case, it was designed and built in the very estate occupied by Justinian and Theodora then and for the foreseeable future. As caesar in 525, then

¹²¹ Theodora's well-known reputation: Procopius, *De aedificiis* 1.95–10; *Anecdota* 17.5 (convent of repentance for reformed prostitutes); John Malalas, *Chronographia* 18.24 (Thurn, 368 = Dindorf, 440–41); John of Nikiu, *Chronicon* 93.3; Justinian, *Novella* 14 (1 December 535). The reference in the

epigram to Theodora is taken by Mango ("Sergius and Bacchus," 191), Bardill ("Refugees," 4), and Shahid ("Sergios and Bakhos," 479–80 [n. 5 above]) as an exclusive reference to support for Monophysites, an unnecessary and unlikely supposition.

¹²² H. Swainson, "Monograms of the

Capitals of S. Sergius at Constantinople," *BZ* 4 (1895): 106–8, and van Millingen, *Churches*, 73–75.

¹²³ Bardill, "Refugees," 2–3.

¹²⁴ Mango, "Once Again," 388; Bardill, "Refugees," 4.

augustus in April 527, Justinian could be assured of one day becoming sole emperor in succession to his uncle. When the church of SS. Sergius and Bacchus was being planned, however, and throughout the years of its construction, he could not know how long Justin would remain as emperor and occupant of the imperial palace. As we have seen, it was probably only after Justin came to the throne in 518 that Justinian moved into the mansion of Hormisdas. Almost immediately he started building the church of SS. Peter and Paul. It is not impossible, given their juxtaposition and common atrium, that both churches were part of a single, original plan. In any event they were built close together in time. If, as suggested here, the entablature inscription could have been carved as early as mid-527 and the church took seven years or so to build, then it would have been designed in the early 520s, about the same time that the church of SS. Peter and Paul was being finished (ca. 520) and slightly before San Vitale.¹²⁵ If, however, it was built in only two to three years, then a planning and commencement date around 524/25 has to be considered. The format of the column monograms suggests, as already noted, that they were not carved after 532. So, if that is the latest possible date for the church's completion, then it is very likely to have been planned and commenced while Justinian and Theodora were living in the Palace of Hormisdas as eminent dignitaries (patricians) and, from 525, as an imperial couple. The palace was not just the "private house of an ordinary citizen," as Mango contended.¹²⁶ The church of SS. Sergius and Bacchus was planned to befit the patrician or new imperial status of Justinian and Theodora. If the church was conceived no later than the mid-520s, then the impetus for its construction needs to be sought in those years.

Entering the church for the first time and observing the epigram's crisp uncial lettering must have been an arresting experience, for the verses begin by challenging the honor of other unspecified imperial churches at Constantinople. As the viewer read the words, silently or out loud, he must have asked himself who are the "other sovereigns" being denigrated here, and who were the "dead men whose labor was unprofitable." While these phrases might be considered as pure literary affectation with no intended allusion to any specific imperial or saintly figures, it is hard to believe that, in the politically and ideologically loaded context of church patronage in sixth-century Constantinople, Justinian had no particular targets in mind. In seeking to distinguish his church of SS. Sergius and Bacchus from those of previous emperors, Justinian was making a pointed comparison. The ἄλλοι βασιλῆς were surely meant to be self-evident, but who could they be?

As has been observed recently by Connor, Bardill, and Shahid,¹²⁷ certain sentiments and phrases in the Sergius and Bacchus epigram

¹²⁵ Mango, *Architecture*, 76–79; Alchermes, "Art and Architecture," 365–66 (both n. 1 above).

¹²⁶ "Once Again," 389.

reflect those in the inscription set out in a comparable location around Anicia Juliana's celebrated church of St. Polyeuctus, which had been constructed not too long before (discussed below).¹²⁷ Justinian's epigram could not boast the imperial genealogy that suffuses the verses of Juliana. Instead, he sought to assert superiority in terms of his dedicatee's spiritual efficacy. Sergius is a worthy saintly patron for an imperial church, Polyeuctus less so. It is a deliberate contrast, a conscious riposte. Justinian may well have been playing on common sentiment. Polyeuctus was a relatively obscure saint, a Roman soldier at Melitene in Armenia who refused to sacrifice to the emperor in the 250s and suffered martyrdom. His cult grew up among the Palestinian monks, in which milieu the empress Eudocia first encountered it. This was probably the inspiration for her establishing a church in his honor in Constantinople.¹²⁸ Yet, despite Polyeuctus's martyrdom there was doubt about whether he ever became a baptized Christian.¹²⁹ Against this uncertainty Justinian was able to proclaim the credentials of Sergius on the entablature inscription: "the Servant of Christ, Begetter of all things, Sergius; whom not the burning breath of fire, nor the sword, nor any other constraint of torments disturbed; but who endured to be slain for the sake of Christ, the God, gaining by his blood heaven as his home." Like Polyeuctus, Sergius was also a military saint and martyr, but one who was now established as a powerful protector possessed of a rapidly expanding cult throughout the East.¹³⁰ At a time when Justinian was still struggling to assert his political legitimacy and authority, he was also claiming supremacy for his new church and for its dedicatee St. Sergius.¹³¹ There could be no doubt which military saint now afforded the better spiritual potential and protection.

¹²⁷ Connor, "Epigram," 511–12 (n. 5 above); Bardill, "Refugees," 4; Shahid, "Sergios and Bakhos," 476–80, cf. P. Cesaretti, *Theodora: Empress of Byzantium* (New York, 2004), 279–81.

¹²⁸ A. M. V. Pizzone, "Da Melitene a Constantinopoli: S. Polieucto nella politica dinastica di Giuliana Anicia; Alcune osservazioni in margine ad AP 1.10," *Maia* 55 (2003): 121; Shahid, "Polyuktos," 347–48 (n. 4, above).

¹²⁹ AASS, February, 2:651–52.

¹³⁰ E. Key Fowden, *Barbarian Plain: Saint Sergius between Rome and Iran* (Berkeley, 1999), 102–5; Shahid, "Sergios and Bakhos," 472–74. The name *Sergius*, a traditional Roman name (*ibid.*, 473–74), grew in popularity through the fifth and sixth century. There are 2 *Sergii* in *PLRE* 1, 9 in *PLRE* 2, and 55 in *PLRE* 3. In contrast, the name

Polyeuctus was taken by few. There are none in *PLRE* 1 and 2 and only one in *PLRE* 3; see A. Poidebard and R. Mouterde, "A propos de Saint Serge: Aviation et Epigraphie," *AB* 67 (1949): 113–14.

¹³¹ When Justinian's church was dedicated it may have been known only as St. Sergius, since its entablature inscription mentions only this single saint. Subsequently, the church is referred to on several occasions over an extensive period as simply "St. Sergius" (*ACO* 3:174.37; John Malalas *Chronicon* 18.111 [Thurn 412 = Dindorf 485.6]; Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De ceremoniis* 1.II; *Anthologia Palatina* 1.8 [lemma]; John of Ephesus, *Vitae sanctorum orientalium* 47 [*PO* 18:684]). In contrast, other documents, the earliest dating from 536, refer to it as the church of "Sts. Sergius and Bacchus" (Procopius, *De aedificiis* 1.4.3;

Patria Constantinoupolenos, ed. T. Preger, *Scriptores Originum Constantinopolitanarum* [Leipzig, 1902–7] 2:231–32; Cedrenus, *Historia* 1.642). It has been suggested that, since Bacchus connoted debauchery and decadence, the name was deliberately suppressed (Shahid, "Sergios and Bakhos," 478–79). A more likely explanation for this double nomenclature is that originally the church was dedicated to St. Sergius alone, but since Sergius and Bacchus had come to be so closely linked in the popular imagination and pious literature it came naturally and quickly to be referred to as SS. Sergius and Bacchus.

Traditionally, the dedication has been assumed to be linked to the establishment of the church for the use of Monophysite monks. That is, since Sergius's cult was most popular in the area where Monophysites predominated, then the choice must have been influenced accordingly.¹³² The real justification for the choice of patron saint would appear to lie, however, in the connection between Justinian and the East. "Justinian's interest in the Syro-Mesopotamian martyr has been given short shrift," according to Elizabeth Key Fowden, by which she means that it is misleading to concentrate on Theodora's connection to Sergius without recognizing that the same was true, if not more so, for Justinian.¹³³ Since the establishment of a major shrine at Resafa in the mid-fifth century Sergius's cult had spread rapidly and decisively throughout the Eastern province and into Persian domains.¹³⁴ As Justin came to the throne in 518, and Justinian moved into the Palace of Hormisdas, a new stone shrine at Resafa was dedicated, replacing the original mud-brick creation.¹³⁵ In other words, by Justinian's time the cult of Sergius had been encountered for several generations by Roman soldiers and officials moving back and forth between the imperial capital and the eastern frontier. Whether or not, as a result, a relic such as the thumb of Sergius was translated to Constantinople, and could be honored in a church named after Sergius, is uncertain.¹³⁶

Sergius's popularity at Constantinople had been growing for over twenty years by the time Justinian built the church in the grounds of his palace complex. He was obviously intent on supporting this movement by solidifying the cult of Sergius within the imperial court. As a soldier himself, Justin had been involved in the zone of Sergius's influence for many years and must have been very familiar with his cult. Nor is it impossible that Justinian had also spent part of his earlier military career in the East in his 20s and 30s, so he too may well have been in Resafa. In fact, a posting in the East may lie behind the discredited story preserved in the Syrian tradition that it was there that he met his wife Theodora.¹³⁷ Since it is not evident that Sergius was exclusively or predominantly a patron of Monophysites, there is no need to presume that Justinian's church dedication was based on a desire to curry favor with Monophysite monks who had sought refuge in the imperial capi-

¹³² Bardill, "Refugees," 5 (n. 3 above).

¹³³ Plain, 132. Besides the church at Constantinople the emperor built a chapel of Sergius in Phoenician Ptolemais and a well at a monastery of St. Sergius in Palestine (Procopius, *De aedificiis* 5.9–20, 25). He and Theodora also sent to Sergius's shrine at Resafa a jeweled cross that was to become one of the shrine's most precious and potent treasures (Evagrius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 4.28).

¹³⁴ Traced in detail in Key Fowden,

Plain, 101ff.

¹³⁵ For the dedicatory inscription: P.-L. Gatier and T. Ulbert, "Eine Tursturzinschrift aus Resafa-Sergiopolis," *Damaszener Mitteilungen* 5 (1991): 169–82.

¹³⁶ Honigmann, *Évêques*, 102–3 (n. 46 above) thought so, but he may have read too much into the relevant text; cf. Gatier and Ulbert, "Resafa," 182 and Key Fowden,

Plain, 232.

¹³⁷ *Chronicon Anonymum ad 819*, ed. and trans. I.-B. Chabot, CSCOSyr 3.14, 192.4–17 [1920 text] = 151.24–35 [1937 trans.].

tal from persecution in the East.¹³⁸ Nor was it necessarily planned and built to provide a talisman for Justinian's war against the Persians, as proposed by Shahîd.¹³⁹ According to the chronology advanced here it was already completed when war broke out in 530.¹⁴⁰ If the church were designed as a talisman, some explicit, or evidently implicit, statement might have been expected in Justinian's entablature inscription. The war continued on until 532. If anything, the war merely accentuated the symbolic significance of an imperial church recently completed and dedicated to an eastern military saint, Sergius.

The impulse and initiative for Justinian's church must lie elsewhere and his rivalry with Anicia Juliana provides the likely source. The idea that, in the period before August 527, Justinian consciously set out to build on his own property a church that would emulate and rival that of Juliana deserves fuller consideration than it has hitherto received.

Justinian and Juliana: St. Sergius versus St. Polyeuctus

Justinian may have become sole emperor by August 527, but his authority was still not unchallenged. His uncle Justin, and now Justinian himself, had struggled to acquire imperial prestige for a lowly born Balkan family surrounded by two generations of aristocratic imperial relatives. In his mural depicting the story of Justin's rise to the throne, Marinus explained that it illustrated how "magnates and rich men and men of high family may not trust in their power and their riches and the greatness of their noble family, but in God, who raises the poor man out of the mire and places him as chief over the people, and rules in the kingdom of men to give it to whom He will, and to set the lowest among men over it, and chooses men of low birth in the world, and men that are rejected, and men that are not, that he may bring to naught men that are."¹⁴¹ Marinus's mural was an ever-present lesson, and throughout the 520s Justinian remained conscious of his imperial rivals, particularly the representatives of previous imperial dynasties. In 525 the former emperor Anastasius's nephew Hypatius conspired to support Justinian's adoption by the Persian king as a means of curbing his potential power. Hypatius was acting out of malice toward the emperor Justin, according to Procopius.¹⁴² Another nephew, Probus, was accused in 528 of plotting against Justinian but was pardoned, while in the following year the *comes excubitorum* Priscus was disgraced and

¹³⁸ As presumed by Bardill, "Refugees," 10 (n. 3 above). Sergius had powerful supporters among both Chalcedonians and anti-Chalcedonians (Key Fowden, *Plain*, 112; Shahid, "Sergios and Bakhos," 468).

¹³⁹ "Sergios and Bakhos," 469–72.

¹⁴⁰ Shahid (*ibid.*, 469, 474) links the

construction of the church to the outbreak of war by dating it to 527. However, in the period from 527 to 529 Justinian's policy was to consolidate and fortify Roman territory while negotiating an enduring peace. War with Persia did not break out until 530; see G. Greatrex, *Rome and Persia at War*, 502–532

(Leeds, 1998), 151–65.

¹⁴¹ Pseudo-Zachariah of Mytilene, *Historia ecclesiastica* 8.1.

¹⁴² Greatrex, *Rome and Persia*, 135–38.

expelled for challenging Theodora.¹⁴³ Opposition to Justinian reached its climax in January 532 during the Nika revolt, which was construed at the time as a senatorial plot to topple the emperor. Justinian was rescued from the brink of fleeing the city by his resolute wife. In the highly charged aftermath of the revolt Anastasius's nephews Hypatius and Pompeius were killed on imperial orders, along with numerous other senators accused of using the riot to install a new emperor. This time Probus was exiled. Also exiled was Olybrius, son of Anicia Juliana and Areobindus.¹⁴⁴ Juliana had probably once hoped or even expected to see her son as emperor, while an oracle of the early sixth century even forecast the rule of an "Olybrius."¹⁴⁵

During the Nika riot the city's main church, the basilical Hagia Sophia, was virtually burned down and had to be replaced. Justinian now seized the opportunity to construct a magnificent new church of Hagia Sophia with an entirely different design. One of the key factors that drove Justinian to such an ambitious design for his new Hagia Sophia was the unexpected opportunity presented to finally eclipse the church that was then the city's largest, most sumptuous, and most elaborate, namely the St. Polyeuctus church of one of the emperor's key political rivals in the 520s, Anicia Juliana. The church of Sergius and Bacchus, on the other hand, has often been cast as a smaller version of the new Hagia Sophia, hence the sobriquet "Little Hagia Sophia." There is a significant similarity of design between them, which has led some to suggest that the former may well have been a prototype for the latter.¹⁴⁶ More important for our purposes here, there are clear links also between St. Polyeuctus and SS. Sergius and Bacchus. It is even possible that their respective epigrams were composed by the same poet and carved by the same craftsman or craftsmen.¹⁴⁷ And the opening words of the Sergius and Bacchus epigram ("other emperors") look like an intentional retort to the imperial city's most splendid church at the time, that of St. Polyeuctus.¹⁴⁸ The new emperor Justinian, who

¹⁴³ Hypatius: Procopius, *Wars* 1.11.31; Probus: John Malalas, *Chronographia* 18.22 (ed. Thurn 367 = Dindorf 438.21–439.7); Priscus: *ibid.* 18.43 (ed. Thurn 377 = Dindorf 449.12–14); Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De insidiis* 45 (ed. C. de Boor [Berlin, 1905], 171.35–172.6).

¹⁴⁴ Probus: John Malalas, *Chronographia* 18.80 (ed. Thurn 403 = Dindorf 478.18–21); Olybrius: *ibid.* 18.80 (ed. Thurn 403 = Dindorf 478.18–21). Detail in G. Greatrex, "Flavius Hypatius, *Quem Videl Validum Parthus Sensitque Timendum*: An Investigation of His Career," *Byzantium* 66 (1996): 136–40 and "The Nika Riot: A

Reappraisal," *JHS* 117 (1997): 60–86; M. Meier, "Die Inszenierung einer Katastrophe: Justinian und der Nika-Aufstand," *ZPE* 142 (2003): 273–300. Still valuable is J. B. Bury, "The Nika Revolt," *JHS* 17 (1897): 92–119.

¹⁴⁵ P. J. Alexander, *The Oracle of Baalbek* (Washington, DC, 1967), 126 n. 15.

¹⁴⁶ It has been suggested, although there is no clear point in favor, that one of the architects of Hagia Sophia, Anthemius or Isidorus, had previously been responsible for Sergius and Bacchus: Mainstone, *Hagia Sophia*, 157 (n. 114 above); but note the caution of Mango, *Architecture*, 58 (n. 1 above).

¹⁴⁷ Both epigrams were also possibly circulated independently in manuscript form; see Al. Cameron, *Porphyrius the Charioteer* (Oxford, 1973), 113. Even so, it seems unlikely that Juliana herself was the author of the Polyeuctus epigram, as proposed by both G. Fowden, "Constantine, Silvester and the Church of S. Polyeuctus in Constantinople," *JRA* 7 (1994): 275, and Connor, "Epigram," 516 (n. 5 above).

¹⁴⁸ Connor, "Epigram," 511–12, with n. 69 (511); Shahid, "Sergios and Bakhos," 478 (n. 5 above).

was born into a lowly Balkan family, was proclaiming his church to be superior in sacral power to that of Juliana and her distinguished line of imperial forebears.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, as we have seen, he was also asserting the spiritual superiority of Sergius over Polyeuctus. The church of St. Polyeuctus was originally constructed by the empress Eudocia, wife of Theodosius II, but most recently was the work of her great-granddaughter Anicia Juliana, daughter of the western Roman sovereign Olybrius.¹⁵⁰ The church was believed by its original excavators to have been built by Juliana from beginning to end between 524 and 527, while the construction of Sergius and Bacchus has normally been placed a few years later, making it more or less contemporary with Hagia Sophia.¹⁵¹ More recently, however, Bardill's research on the brickstamps of St. Polyeuctus has put the church's construction earlier; it was commenced nearly two decades earlier and it was completed in the early to mid-520s. On the basis of his analysis of the brickstamps, he has dated the bricks in the substructure between 508/9 and 511/12, with those in the superstructure belonging to the period between 517/18 and 520/21.¹⁵² This means that Juliana's magnificent feat began under Anastasius, but was revealed in all its glory only at the time Justin was emperor and his nephew Justinian was emerging at court. In other words, it was being built at exactly the same time as Justinian's SS. Peter and Paul church. Given the connections, noted above, between the churches of St. Polyeuctus and SS. Sergius and Bacchus, an earlier completion date for the former (early 520s) makes possible an earlier completion date for the latter (before August 527, or shortly thereafter). This revised chronology, which means that Sergius and Bacchus was constructed in the Hormisdas palace grounds during Justinian's residence there, and while Juliana was still alive, makes more plausible and more explicable the notion that Justinian's church was conceived as a response to Juliana's.

Juliana represented a potent challenge to Justinian. As the daughter of an emperor she was *nobilissima* (ἐπιφανεστάτη), in fact the only one at Constantinople at the time with the title.¹⁵³ She boasted not only venerable aristocratic pedigree, but an imperial lineage of several generations, both western and eastern. There was a public reminder of her

¹⁴⁹ Shahid, "Sergios and Bakhos," 476–78.

¹⁵⁰ Details: R. Harrison, "The Church of St. Polyeuktos in Istanbul and the Temple of Solomon," in *Okeanos: Essays Presented to Ihor Ševčenko on His Sixtieth Birthday by His Colleagues and Students = Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 7 (1983): 4–5, and *Temple*, 33–41 (n. 115 above); Bardill, *Brickstamps*, 125–26 (n. 6 above); and H.-R. Toivanen, "The Church of St Polyeuktos: Archaeology

and Texts," *Acta Byzantina Fennica* 2 (2003–4): 127–50. A new study of the church, based on a different chronology, interpretation and reconstruction, is being prepared by Jonathan Bardill.

¹⁵¹ Harrison, *Excavations*, 4, 223; *Temple*, 35 (both n. 115 above).

¹⁵² *Brickstamps*, 62–64; 111–16. The brickstamps were originally catalogued by S. J. Hill in Harrison, *Excavations*, 207–25.

Also A. Pizzone, "Polyeucto," 127 n. 93 (n. 128 above).

¹⁵³ John Malalas, *Chronicon* 16.19 (Thurn, 334.29 = Dindorf 407.19), cf. P. Koch, *Die Byzantinischen Beamtentitel von 400 bis 700* (diss., Jena, 1903), 99–100.

credentials in the epigrams of her churches. The complex inscription in St. Polyeuctus covers three imperial generations. The only member of Juliana's family mentioned by name is her great-grandmother Eudocia: Εὐδοκίη...ἀνασσα (Anthologia Palatina 1.10, line 1)...ἀριστώδινος ἀνάσσης (line 9). Juliana can therefore be described as having imperial blood (line 8), as having accomplished her feat on behalf of the souls of her imperial ancestors, as well as for those now alive and those to come (lines 74–76). There is a clear emphasis on dynastic continuity. In particular, the imperial claim of Juliana's son Olybrius is highlighted by the reference to the family's present and future members (ἐσσομένων καὶ ἔόντων, *Anthologia Palatina* 1.97, line 76). A similar sentiment is found in the dedicatory epigram for another of Juliana's churches, St. Euphemia.¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, according to Bardill's revised chronology, the construction of St. Polyeuctus had already commenced in 512, when she would have become empress, had the attempt to promote her husband Areobindus as a replacement for the unpopular Anastasius succeeded. Her authority and prestige remained unassailable, while her well-known Chalcedonian orthodoxy was also an attraction.¹⁵⁵ When Pope Hormisdas wrote to her from Rome on 22 July 519, he could refer to her as being ennobled by imperial blood.¹⁵⁶ Juliana's superior status was evident, too, in the frontispiece of the Vienna manuscript of Dioscorides, where she is represented as embodying the distinctly imperial virtues of Sophia, Phronesis, and Megalopsychia.¹⁵⁷ Yet she was never an empress herself, and so could not be ἀνασσα, although such a title has mistakenly been claimed for her.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ *Anthologia Palatina* 1.12, lines 8–10; 1.14, lines 1–2.

¹⁵⁵ C. Capizzi, "Anicia Giuliana (462ca–530ca): Ricerche sulla sua famiglia e la sua vita," *Rivista di studi bizantini e neoellenici* 15 (1968): 214–26, and *Giuliana la committente* (Milan, 1997): 65–91. For Juliana's constructions: C. Capizzi, "L'attività edilizia di Anicia Giuliana," *Collectanea Byzantina*, OCA 204 (Rome, 1977): 120–46, and *Giuliana*, 93–130; C. Connor, *Women of Byzantium* (New Haven, 2004), 105–16.

¹⁵⁶ *Collectio Avellana* 179.2 (635): "ut sicut personam uestram imperialis sanguinis uena nobilitat, ita conscientia bonorum meritorum luce praefulgeat."

¹⁵⁷ B. Kiilerich, "The Image of Anicia Juliana in the Vienna Dioscurides: Flattery or Appropriation of Imperial Imagery?" *Symbolae Osloenses* 76 (2001): 172–73, 185. For its artistic context: L. Brubaker, "The Vienna Dioskorides and Anicia Juliana," in

Byzantine Garden Culture, A. Littlewood, H. Maguire, and J. Wolschke-Bulmahn (Washington, DC, 2002), 189–214 and Connor, *Women*, 110–12.

¹⁵⁸ Proposed by Kiilerich, "Anicia Juliana," 169–90, but assumed by Connor, "Epigram," 509 (n. 5 above). See references in *PLRE* 2:636: "Juliana 3." Kiilerich notes that in the frontispiece of the Dioscorides MS, in an epigram traceable through the internal octagonal borders of the depiction of Juliana, she is described as Ιον. ἀνασσα. On closer inspection, however, the ἀνασσα turns out to be a modern restoration of a now-invisible original (proposed by A. von Premerstein, "Anicia Juliana im Wiener Dioskorides-Codex," *JbKSAK* 24 [1903]: 111). It could just as easily be πατρικία, rather than ἀνασσα, which would conform to the way Juliana is depicted in patrician dress. *Patricia* was Juliana's usual title (*PLRE* 2:636, "Juliana 3"), although she was also *nobilissima*.

Juliana could use both her literary patronage and her ecclesiastical building program to promote the imperial credentials of herself and her family. In displaying her lavish new church of St. Polyeuctus at Constantinople in the 520s, Juliana claimed to have rivaled another royal builder—Solomon and his Jerusalem temple.¹⁵⁹ With Hagia Sophia in the 530s Justinian boasted that not merely did he, too, rival Solomon, but that he surpassed him altogether.¹⁶⁰ Justinian, not Juliana, was the builder of the new temple of Solomon. No wonder it was rumored then that Justinian himself had deliberately provoked the revolt that led to the incineration of the basilical church of Hagia Sophia in 532 and necessitated its replacement.¹⁶¹ Just months after the inauguration of the new Hagia Sophia, Justinian sought to head off any potential future rivals such as Juliana by making it more difficult for anyone else to build a church, monastery, or house of prayer in Constantinople or elsewhere.¹⁶² While the function of Hagia Sophia as a deliberate attempt by Justinian to outdo Juliana has come to be well recognized, less attention has been paid, until quite recently, to the possible connections between Juliana's church of St. Polyeuctus and Justinian's earlier church of SS. Sergius and Bacchus.¹⁶³ As is now clear, stylistic similarities in their decoration appear to link the two churches.¹⁶⁴ Some masons and sculptors probably worked on both Polyeuctus and Sergius and Bacchus, as well as later on Hagia Sophia.¹⁶⁵ As already noted, the identifiable affinities between their dedicatory epigrams suggest that SS. Sergius and Bacchus consciously sought to answer the political and dynastic challenge represented by St. Polyeuctus.

¹⁵⁹ Juliana: *Anthologia Palatina* 1.10, line 48: “καὶ σοφίην παρέλασσεν ἀειδομένου Σολομώνος”—elucidated by Harrison, “Polyeuktos” (n. 150 above) and *Temple*, 40, 139 (n. 115 above). Juliana may also have sought to emulate Ezekiel's temple, as proposed by C. Milner, “The Image of the Rightful Ruler: Anicia Juliana's Constantine Mosaic in the Church of Hagios Polyeuktos,” in *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th–13th Centuries*, ed. P. Magdalino (London, 1994), 73–81.

¹⁶⁰ “ἐνίκησά σε, Σολομών” (*Diegesis*, ed. T. Preger, *Scriptores Originum Constantinopolitanarum* [Leipzig, 1902–7], 1:105). Justinian placed a statue of Solomon opposite his new church as a permanent reminder of the scale of his feat (*Patria Constantinopoleos* 2.40 [Preger, *Scriptores* 2:171]). Romanos infers that Hagia Sophia is the new temple of Solomon risen from

the ashes (*Canticum* 54, strophes κα'–κβ', ed. P. Maas and C. A. Trypanis [Oxford, 1963], 470), which was echoed by Corippus: *Salomoniaci sileat descripicio templi* (ed. Av. Cameron, *In laudem Iustini Augusti Minoris* [London, 1976], 2.283).

¹⁶¹ Procopius *De aedificiis* 1.1.22 (anyone aware of the outcome would have justified the fire). Melodically, Romanos was able to reduce what was obviously considered an unseemly short interval to a mere day: “ἀλλ᾽ ἐνταῦθα μετὰ μίαν τῆς πτώσεως ἡρξαντο ἡμέραν / τὸ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἐγερείσθαι ἔργον” (*Canticum* 54, strophe κβ', 5–6 [Trypanis 470]).

¹⁶² Justinian, *Novella*, 67 (538); Procopius, *De aedificiis* 1.8.5.

¹⁶³ Harrison, *Excavations*, 420, and *Temple*, 40 (both n. 115 above); Mainstone, *Hagia Sophia*, 148 (n. 114 above); Connor, “Epigram,” 482, 510 (n. 5 above); James,

Empresses, 158; McClanan, *Representations*, 94–98 (both n. 4 above).

¹⁶⁴ C. Strube, *Polyeuktoskirche und Hagia Sophia: Umbildung und Auflösung antiker Formen, Entstehen des Kämpferkapitells* (Munich, 1984), 82, 91 (n. 410), suggesting that Sergius and Bacchus can be dated after 527 purely on the questionable grounds of style of capital relief, and L. Pasquini Vecchi, “La scultura di S. Polieucto: Episodio saliente nel quadro della cultura artistica di Costantinopoli,” *Bizantinistica* 1 (1999): 109–44, highlighting the oriental influences on the sculpture; see also Krautheimer, *Architecture*, 225–26 (n. 1 above).

¹⁶⁵ Harrison, *Excavations*, 414–15, 418; *Temple*, 141.

This manifest correlation in dedicatory epigram and architectural style between the churches of Justinian and Juliana, combined with the new earlier chronology for the construction of St. Polyeuctus, requires renewed inspection of the surviving record of a direct personal encounter between Justinian and Juliana in her Polyeuctus church. The episode was recounted by Gregory of Tours several decades later.¹⁶⁶ As Gregory tells the story, news of the wealth of a “certain Juliana” reached the ears of the emperor Justinian, whereupon he paid her a visit in the hope of persuading her to divert some of her wealth from the erection of churches. He wanted her resources to support, instead, the more secular purposes of war and beautification of the city of Constantinople.¹⁶⁷ In return she would earn the respect and acclamation of posterity. Further, her generosity would be honorifically recorded and she would be remembered as someone who assisted in the embellishment of Constantinople.¹⁶⁸ This strategy looks like an attempt to link the emperor’s own fortunes and plans to Juliana’s considerable resources and prestige. It was possibly part of a wider plan to acquire aristocratic estates, by persuasion or coercion, and devote their resources to building churches. Procopius repeatedly accuses Justinian of exactly that.¹⁶⁹ Juliana protested that her wealth was spread across many properties, but that she would gather it together for him. Meanwhile, she collected all her available gold, melted it down, and had it made into gold plates to adorn the ceiling of her new church of St. Polyeuctus. Some time later, Justinian, who had already presumed imperial use for the newly assembled gold, was summoned to Juliana’s mansion to view what she had collected. “What pitiful small wealth I have put together is ready here,” she said. “Come and gaze on it and do what you please.” She then took the emperor into her nearby church of St. Polyeuctus and asked him to fix his eyes on its newly gold-plated ceiling: “Look up, I beseech you, at the roof of this church, most glorious Emperor, and know that my poor resources are contained in this work. You must now do what you want. I offer no opposition” (*Suspice, quae so, came ram huius aedis, gloriosissime Augste, et scito quia paupertas mea in hoc opere continetur. Tu vero quod voleris exinde facito, non adver sor*). Justinian was duly shamed and praised the magnificence of the

¹⁶⁶ Text: *Gregorii Episcopi Turonensis Liber in Gloria Martyrum*, ed. B. Krusch, MGH. *ScriptRerMerov* 1.2 (Hanover, 1885; repr. 1969), 105–7; trans: R. van Dam, *The Glory of the Martyrs* (Liverpool, 1988), 124–26. Another translation, but based on an earlier and less reliable text, is in Harrison, *Excavations*, 9. The most recent, and most analytical, discussion is that of J. Bardill, “A New Temple for Byzantium: Anicia

Juliana, King Solomon, and the Gilded Ceiling of the Church of St Polyeuktos in Constantinople,” in *Social and Political Life in Late Antiquity*, ed. W. Bowden, A. Gutteridge, and C. Machado (Leiden, 2006), 339–70.

¹⁶⁷ Gregory of Tours, *Gloria martyrum* 102 (Krusch, 106.4–8).

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. 102 (Krusch 106.7–8): “laudis tuae titulo praecurrente, canatur urbem

Constantinopolitanam a Juliana matrona fuisse pecuniis sublevatam.”

¹⁶⁹ Procopius, *Anecdota* 6.18.20, 8.9, 8.31–33, 13.6, with Bardill, *Brickstamps*, 34 (n. 6 above).

ceiling. He was about to take his leave when Juliana interrupted him to explain that she had something more precious to give him than all her gold, namely, a ring containing an extraordinary emerald.¹⁷⁰ Gregory concludes his story by explaining how Polyeuctus had intervened to assist Juliana in outwitting the greedy Justinian, just as the saint always did in such situations.¹⁷¹

The point of Gregory's story is to illustrate the effectiveness of St. Polyeuctus in countering rapacious behavior. As with the other stories he includes in his *Glory of the Martyrs*, Gregory was not so much concerned with the local chronological and topographical details, but with the moral lesson to be derived from his anecdote. Gregory's information probably originated with eastern ambassadors, traders, or others passing through Gaul, and is essentially authentic.¹⁷² Usually the description has been taken at face value.¹⁷³ However, there are several incongruous elements of this vignette that have not been adequately explained. There is no indication of date, for example, except that it must be toward the end of Juliana's life.¹⁷⁴ She is a frail elderly lady ("senex") who needs Justinian's physical support on the short walk from her nearby mansion to her church.¹⁷⁵ Since Juliana died in 528 and Justinian is described as emperor ("imperator," "augustus") in this episode, it would appear to be dated between April 527 and the end of 528 (at the latest).¹⁷⁶

Given that, on Bardill's new chronology, the St. Polyeuctus church was dedicated well before Justinian became augustus in April 527, Gregory's account presents a dilemma: either the implied date is wrong, or his description of how the ceiling came to be gold plated is wrong.

¹⁷⁰ Juliana's remark to Justinian: "Accipe, imperator sacratissime, hoc munusculum de manu mea, quod super pretium huius auri valere censetur"; Gregory of Tours, *Gloria martyrum* 102 (Krusch, 106.32–33). The ring symbolizes, as so often in literature, the locus of power. Juliana is acknowledging that her power and the status deriving from her imperial line are now formally passed to Justinian, thereby relinquishing any future support for the installation of her son Olybrius. It may be a claim once made by Justinian as part of the drawn-out process of securing and advertising his own legitimacy. The ring suddenly linked Justinian's own house to that of Theodosius, while the whole encounter vindicated the spiritual virtue of St. Polyeuctus (Harrison, *Temple*, 40). This ring is possibly the same one once worn by Nero when presiding as emperor at gladiatorial combats, which would only

have strengthened its symbolic potency (Pliny, *Historia Naturalis* 37.64). For an explanation of the stone and its connection with Nero: Epiphanius of Constantia, *De XII gemmis rationalis* 12 (*Collectio Aveliana* 244, 747–49). If this was originally Nero's ring it was probably still being used by emperors up to the time of Juliana's father, Olybrius.

¹⁷¹ Gregory of Tours, *Gloria martyrum* 102 (Krusch, 105.20–24, 107.2–5).

¹⁷² Gregory's information on the emperors Justin II and Tiberius is generally sound: Av. Cameron, "The Byzantine Sources of Gregory of Tours," *JTS* 26 (1975), 421–26 (repr. in *Continuity and Change in 6th Century Byzantium* [London, 1981]).

¹⁷³ For example by C. Mango and I. Ševčenko, "Remains of the Church of St. Polyeuktos at Constantinople," *DOP* 15 (1961): 245, as well as Harrison, *Excavations*,

420 and *Temple*, 40 (both n. 115 above).

¹⁷⁴ There is no evidence for claiming that Justinian here sought out Juliana "on his accession" (Harrison, *Temple*, 40).

¹⁷⁵ The mansion must have been close to the church, possibly on the Mese near the house of Eudocia. It may even be the house of Eudocia, as proposed in the ingenious study of P. Magdalino, "Aristocratic *Oikoi* in the Tenth and Eleventh Regions of Constantinople," in *Byzantine Constantinople: Monuments, Topography and Everyday Life*, ed. N. Necipoğlu (Leiden, 2001), 58–59.

¹⁷⁶ Juliana's death is placed by Cyril of Scytopolis (normally punctilious about dates) between the death of Justin I in August 527 (*Vita Sabae* 68 [Schwartz 170.15]) and Saint Sabas's 91st year, in 529 (*ibid.* 69 [Schwartz 171.7]).

That is, if Gregory's implied date is to be followed, then the church of St. Polyeuctus (ca. 521) was already built when Justinian, as emperor, first heard about Juliana's wealth (527/28), so its glittering ceiling must have been an unscheduled afterthought provoked by Justinian's greed.¹⁷⁷ Certainly, two phases of decoration several years apart (520/21 and 527/28) are not impossible. Yet, the internal chronology of Gregory's narrative necessitates a considerable period of time for the putative second phase alone. Weeks and months surely passed between Juliana's promise to show Justinian her remaining wealth spread across all her properties and her subsequent installation of gold plaques (*tabulae*) to cover the ceiling of St. Polyeuctus. Quite apart from the craftsmanship involved, the ceiling was both the most central and the least accessible part of the building. Erecting and dismantling the necessary scaffolding would have interrupted the essential use of the church for a lengthy period, not to mention the special provisions required to avoid damaging the building's exquisite internal fabric. Since, on the implicit chronology of Gregory's account, there can only have been a few months between Justinian becoming *augustus* (April 527) and the death of Juliana (sometime in 528) it makes for a very tight, but not impossible, fit. Even so, imputing to Gregory a two-phase decoration is fundamentally problematic.

The epigram set out at St. Polyeuctus clearly describes its golden ceiling, thereby implying that it was part of the church's original construction.¹⁷⁸ If so, then it must refer to the final phase of St. Polyeuctus, around 521. In that event Gregory simply applied the imperial title retrospectively, or as the obvious way of designating Justinian, and when Justinian petitioned Juliana to offer her wealth for "our" use—"dum vos quietos esse volumus, dum patrias defensare studemus, dum gentes nobis placamus, dum solatia diversorum dando conquerimur"—he was not merely using an imperial plural. Rather he was referring to a period when he was closely associated with the emperor Justin, his uncle and adoptive father. This is strikingly similar to the language of imperial edicts and of Justinian's letters in the early 520s.¹⁷⁹ As magister militum and caesar Justinian was busily involved in the construction of churches during those very years (520–27). Perhaps his plea to Juliana was to dedicate some of her enormous funds to restoring the church of

¹⁷⁷ Bardill, *Brickstamps*, 62, 111–16 (n. 6 above).

¹⁷⁸ *Anthologia Palatina* 1.10, line 57 ("χρυσοφόρου ἀκτίνας ἀερτάζουσι καλύπτρης") with Mango and Ševčenko, "Remains," 245 and Connor, "Epigram," 491 and 502 (n. 5 above). The dome of Hagia Sophia in Edessa was also covered in gold mosaic; see A.

Palmer and L. Rodley, "The Inauguration Anthem of Hagia Sophia in Edessa: A New Critical Edition and Translation with Historical and Architectural Notes and Comparison with a Contemporary Constantinopolitan Kontakion," *BMGS* 12 (1988): 131, 158–59. The ceiling of St. Polyeuctus was not domed, as Harrison

thought, but a trussed flat roof, as explained by Bardill, "New Temple" (n. 166 above).

¹⁷⁹ For example: *Collectio Avellana* 162.2 (614): "pro nobis quoque mandatorum uestrorum custodibus...nosque supplices"; cf. 187.5 (645); 191.1 (645); 235.5 (716).

the Virgin at Blachernae, for instance, or possibly even the church of SS. Peter and Paul at the Hormisdas palace, which was definitely built in the early 520s.

The story picked up in Constantinople by Gregory's informants, even though it became distorted in the telling and retelling, recounts a well-known encounter that lay at the heart of the rivalry between Justinian and Juliana. Furthermore, Gregory's tale of the efficacy of St. Polyeuctus would appear to explain Justinian's riposte in the entablature epigram in SS. Sergius and Bacchus, namely that Polyeuctus was a useless saint unworthy of an imperial church dedication ("θανόντας / ἀνέρας, ὃν ἀνόνητος ἔην πόνος," lines 1–2). Apparently no more Byzantine churches were dedicated to St. Polyeuctus after Juliana's, which may be partly explained by the influence of Justinian's pointed criticism of his spiritual status.¹⁸⁰

Gregory's moral preoccupation continually drives his narrative. As a result, he seems not to realize that Juliana was not just another Byzantine grande dame ("Juliana quaedam urbis illius matrona"). She was in fact a nobilissima, the city's most eminent woman and the mastermind of what was for a brief period its most magnificent church. Justinian is said to have discovered Juliana's wealth only by hearsay ("Cum ad imperatorem Justinianum fama facultatis eius, multis narrantibus, pervenisset"). But since it is simply fanciful to imagine that Justinian learned about Juliana's wealth only after he became augustus in 527, this constitutes another reason for dating Gregory's story to around 521. Both Justinian and Juliana were enthusiastically involved in religious affairs. Indeed, they worked together in 518/19 by corresponding with Pope Hormisdas about the emerging reunification of the eastern and western churches. Juliana would have been among the distinguished crowd that welcomed the papal envoys to Constantinople and formed a candlelight *adventus*, a procession into the city. She wrote to Hormisdas on 22 April 519 in terms not dissimilar to Justinian's letter on the same day.¹⁸¹ Their letters were delivered to the pope by the same envoy. Hormisdas replied to them both at the same time, reminding Juliana that she was ennobled by imperial blood. She later wrote again to Hormisdas, as did Justinian.¹⁸²

In the wake of the settlement with Rome in 519 Justinian built his church of SS. Peter and Paul, incorporating relics he had sought directly from the Pope. His church was clearly designed to reflect the newly reestablished ecclesial unity of East and West. Juliana's church may well have been designed to do the same.¹⁸³ In 525/26 Juliana greeted Pope John on his arrival in Constantinople and doubtless introduced him to the mosaic in her church, which depicted the baptism of Constantine. This particular scene symbolized the unity of

¹⁸⁰ There was one other fifth-century church of Polyeuctus at Constantinople, although there is some uncertainty about its location (Janin, *Églises*, 420 [n. 2 above]).

¹⁸¹ *Collectio Avellana* 164 (615], with Pizzone, "Polieucto," 122–32 (n. 128 above).

¹⁸² *Collectio Avellana* 179 (635), 198 (657–58).

¹⁸³ Bardill, *Brickstamps*, 115–16.

East and West, which was exemplified also by Juliana and her family.¹⁸⁴ It also highlighted her family's claim to have inherited the mantle of Constantine, the Christian emperor.¹⁸⁵ Now, however, she had a rival. At this very time the emperor Justin was being acclaimed by the people of Constantinople as the "new Constantine" for his role in restoring ecclesial unity with the bishop of Rome.¹⁸⁶ His nephew Justinian was closely coupled with him promoting a religious policy that allied emperor and pope, emperor and patriarch. Justinian's vigorous activity in building and restoring churches during the reign of his uncle, including the construction of SS. Sergius and Bacchus, was designed to entrench his political and religious standing.

Conclusion

The church of SS. Sergius and Bacchus on the estate of the Palace of Hormisdas was not planned and built in the early 530s, at the initiative of the empress Theodora, to serve the liturgical needs of refugee Monophysite monks. Nor was it constructed to promote and commemorate Justinian's war with the Persians, which commenced in 530. Instead, it was planned and built by Justinian while he actually resided at the Palace of Hormisdas in the mid 520s and while he was consolidating his career as patrician, caesar and, from April 527, augustus. It was about the same time that the church with which it has been most frequently linked, San Vitale at Ravenna, was designed. The period of the construction of SS. Sergius and Bacchus was marked by insecurity for Justinian, who was still establishing the imperial credibility of his Balkan family in the wake of venerable imperial rivals, particularly the family of Anicia Juliana. The church is best explained as a programmatic response to Juliana and the overt imperial ideology of her St. Polyeuctus church. Bardill's new chronology also suggests that SS. Sergius and Bacchus was the first church for which Justinian had responsibility after Juliana had completed St. Polyeuctus. His more decisive response to that church came in the early 530s with his construction of Hagia Eirene and especially Hagia Sophia, where the rivalry is made so explicit. Yet that opportunity arose only from the unforeseen catastrophe of the Nika riot, which resulted in the devastation of churches that were standing firm and indestructible when SS. Sergius and Bacchus was built. In the inscribed entablature epigram of St. Sergius the emperor Justinian boldly claims to have surpassed other emperors, and to have chosen a military saint who surpasses their chosen saints. Juliana's Polyeuctus was Justinian's obvious target. In the period around 525–27 his new church of SS. Sergius and Bacchus was his best and only chance to respond. The church was designed and built as one befitting the status and ceremonial of the caesar and his consort (from 525), then the augustus and his augusta (from April 527).

¹⁸⁴ Key Fowden, *Plain*, 278ff.

¹⁸⁵ Pizzone, "Polieucto," 130–31.

¹⁸⁶ ACO 3:27 (74.23).

It fulfilled this imperial role for only a brief period. Disconnecting the church from Theodora's later assistance for refugee monks in the under-utilized palace puts into sharper perspective the narrowness of her support, and the extent to which her religious activities were circumscribed by Justinian. Assigning the church of SS. Sergius and Bacchus to the period when Justinian occupied the Hormisdas palace highlights its ceremonial function and clearly restores the initiative for its construction to Justinian himself.

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